



THE DYNAMICS OF RHETORICAL PERFORMANCES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas



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This book argues that narrations of rhetorical performances in late antique literature can be interpreted as a reflection of the ongoing debates of the time. Competition among cultural elites, strategies of self-presentation and the making of religious orthodoxy often took the shape of narrations of rhetorical performances in which comments on the display of oratorical skills also incorporated moral and ethical judgments about the performer. Using texts from late antique authors (in particular, Themistius, Synesius of Cyrene and Libanius of Antioch), this book proposes that this type of narrative should be understood as a valuable way to decipher the cultural and religious landscape of the fourth century AD. The volume pays particular attention to narrations of deficient rhetorical deliveries, arguing that the accounts of flaws and mistakes in oratorical displays and rhetorical performances reveal how late antique literature echoed the concerns of the time. Criticisms of deficient deliveries in different speaking occasions (declamations, public speeches, oratorical *agones*, school exercises, sermons) were often disguised as accusations of practicing magic, heresy or cultural apostasy. A close reading of the sources shows that these oratorical deficiencies hid struggles over religious, cultural and political issues.

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 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Quiroga Puertas, Alberto J., 1978– author.

Title: The dynamics of rhetorical performances in late antiquity / Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon : Routledge, 2018. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018028644 | ISBN 9781472474599 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315615776 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Rhetoric, Ancient. | Performance in literature. | Rhetorical criticism—Rome. | Libanius—Criticism and interpretation.

Classification: LCC PA6085 .Q57 2018 | DDC 808.5/109—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018028644>

ISBN: 978-1-4724-7459-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-61577-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Contents

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

Introduction

1 Theory and practice of rhetorical performance from Classical Antiquity to Imperial times

Literature review

Theoretical approaches to rhetorical performance in Antiquity

Narrations of rhetorical performances in Greco-Roman literature

2 Charlatans, philosophers and Philostratean bishops in late antique literature

Philosophers, belletrists and charlatans

Philostratean bishops

3 *All the world's a stage*: Libanius' life as a rhetorical performance

Literature review

Becoming a sophist

A performable life. The narrations of rhetorical performances in Libanius' Autobiography

A star is born

Homecoming

4 Conclusions

Index

Acknowledgments

The main author studied in this book is the sophist Libanius of Antioch. Throughout his works he credited the goddess Τυχή, frequently translated as Fortune, for the enjoyment of many eventful moments of his life. Whether it is due to a number of years dedicated to the study of the sophist's works, or to a process of religious osmosis, I can unhesitatingly say that I would not be guilty of hubris if I also boasted of having received Τυχή's favors in many, many respects. But first things first. From an institutional point of view, I am legally bound to state that part of the research carried out for this book was possible thanks to a "Ramón y Cajal" fellowship granted by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. Period. This is not the place for a political manifesto or to voice my opinion about the systematic policy of underfunding of the Sciences and (what is left of) the Humanities in Spain. I was fortunate to obtain this fellowship, but a great number of worthy colleagues have found themselves in very difficult situations because of senseless and self-interested financial cuts.

On a brighter note, I would like to thank the institution where I work, the Ancient Greek Department of the University of Granada, for making it easy to undertake the research trips during which this book has been created. I wish to record here that partial versions of this book were presented in seminars held at The Catholic University of America, The University of California, San Diego and the University of Salamanca. I am very grateful to these universities for letting me present provisional results of my research. Two institutions from the University of Oxford (The Corpus Christi College Centre for the Study of Greek and Roman Antiquity, and the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity) have generously granted me access to the Sackler and Bodleian libraries, for which I am extremely grateful.

When it comes to professional and personal acknowledgments, I must begin with a caveat: forgetfulness, and not ingratitude, must be held accountable for the absence of the names of people whose assistance is not recorded here. The blame for this should be put on Τυχή, as she has worked wonders by making the list of people that I should thank incredibly long. Therefore, restraint here is in order lest I end up writing an autobiographical account à la Libanius.

Having eased my conscience, I would like to thank a number of friends and colleagues that have been kind enough to read and provide insightful comments on the manuscript of this book. Danny Evans and Bryson Sewell have not only taken care of polishing my unpalatable English by correcting it to meet academic standards but have also given me very valuable feedback on the contents of the book. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Alex Petkas, whose acumen and suggestions have much improved the final draft. Over the years that this project has been in progress conversations and email correspondence with other colleagues and friends have made an incredibly positive impact on the arguments of this book: José María Camacho Rojo (†), Javier Campos Daroca, Raffaella Cribiore, José Fernández Ubiña, Ryan Fowler, Pedro Pablo Fuentes González, Lorena Jiménez Justicia, Concepción López Rodríguez, Laura Miguélez-Cavero, Lorenzo Miletto, Isabel Moreno, Liz Potter, Alberto Rigolio, Philip Rousseau, Lieve Van Hoof, Peter Van Nuffelen, Carlo Vessella, Edward Watts and the anonymous referees who read the manuscript of the book. They are, of course, entirely blameless for the errors and mistakes that I may have made. Special thanks are due to my editor, Michael Greenwood. His patience, encouragement and understanding are very much appreciated. The help and support of my family throughout these years has been continuous. Together with them, friends must be credited with the type of help that goes way beyond the realm of academia. Apart from researching, in Oxford I have benefitted over the years from the friendship of the “Combibos-NOOC Community”: the Atienza-Cavero family, Francisco Bosch, Raúl Baeza, Lucía Díaz-Iglesias, Iñaki Izarra and Leire Olabarria. Given that all the ways that come to my mind to express my feelings for them would read as a cheap sentence from a self-help book or an over-sentimental line from a wedding speech, I will honor their friendship by remaining silent.

Likewise, I feel incapable of putting into words my enormous debt of gratitude to Angie. Suffice it to say here that this book is dedicated to her for teaching me and initiating me in the most secret, exclusive and unparalleled joys of *Pilinguilm*.

Abbreviations

The abbreviations of the names and works of the ancient authors used in this book follow those of the LSJ. When the name of an author is not listed there, I have used modern scholarly conventions to refer to his name and works.

L&S	C.T. Lewis and C. Short, <i>A Latin Dictionary</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
LSJ ⁹	H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H.S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
PLRE	A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris, <i>The Prosopography of the later Roman Empire</i> , 3 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992.

Libanius' orations, declamations and progymnasmata have been quoted following R. Foester's edition: *Libanii Opera*, 12 vols., Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1927.

Translations of Libanius' orations have been taken from the following:

Or. 1: A.F. Norman, *Autobiography and selected letters*, 2 vols., Cambridge (MA)-London: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Ors. 2, 19: A.F. Norman, *Selected Orations. Volume II: 2, 19–23, 30, 33, 45, 47–50*, Cambridge (MA)-London: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Or. 13: A.F. Norman, *Selected Orations. Volume I: Julianic orations*, Cambridge (MA)-London: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Ors. 3, 11, 31, 62, 36: A.F. Norman, *Antioch as a centre of Hellenic culture as observed by Libanius*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000.

Ors. 35, 38, 55: R. Cribiore, *Between city and school: selected orations of Libanius*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015.

The number and the letter in the references to the sophist's epistles reflect their order in the translation of the following scholars:

B	S. Bradbury, <i>Selected letters of Libanius: from the age of Constantius and Julian</i> , Liverpool:
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C

Liverpool University Press, 2004.

R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

F

R. Foester, *Libanii Opera*, 12 vols., Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1927.

N

A.F. Norman, *Autobiography and selected letters*, 2 vols., Cambridge (MA)-London: Harvard University Press, 1992.

We must imagine a beauty of stone and earth rather than of woods and greenery. With warmth and sunshine and months of brilliant, fine weather, life of course is instantly changed; it is transacted out of doors, with the result, known to all who visit Italy, that small incidents are debated in the street, not in the sitting-room, and become dramatic; make people voluble; inspire in them that sneering, laughing, nimbleness of wit and tongue peculiar to the Southern races, which has nothing in common with the slow reserve, the low half-tones, the brooding introspective melancholy of people accustomed to live more than half the year indoors.

That is the quality that first strikes us in Greek literature, the lightning-quick, sneering, out-of-doors manner.

Virginia Woolf, *On not knowing Greek*

Introduction

In a letter to Tuccius Cerialis (2.XIX.1–4), Pliny the Younger reluctantly accepted his addressee's request:

You urge me to give a reading of my speech to a group of friends. I will since you ask it, but with many misgivings. I know very well that speeches when read lose all their warmth and spirit (*impetum omnem caloremque*), almost their entire character (*nomen suum*), since their fire is always fed from the atmosphere of the court: the bench of magistrates and throng of advocates, the suspense of the awaited verdict, the reputation of the different speakers, and the divided enthusiasm of the public; and they gain too from the gestures of the speaker as he strides to and fro, the movements of his body corresponding to his changing passions (*ad hoc dicentis gestus incessus, discursus etiam omnibusque motibus animi consentaneus vigor corporis*). (Hence the loss to anyone who delivers his speech sitting down – he is at a real disadvantage by the mere fact of being seated, though he may be as gifted generally as the speakers who stand.) Moreover, a man who is giving a reading has the two chief aids to his delivery (eyes and hands) taken up with his text, so it is not surprising if the attention of his audience wavers when there is no adventitious attraction to hold it nor stimulus to keep it aroused (*Quo minus mirum est, si auditorum intentio relanguescit, nullis extrinsecus aut blandimentis capta aut aculeis excitata*).¹

One cannot but agree with Pliny's argument. Speeches lose a great deal of their vigor and attractiveness when read outside the context in which they were composed and delivered. The titillating excitement surrounding a live performance, that stimulating quality and manner to which Virginia Woolf refers in the excerpt on the previous page, simply vanishes. Gestures, intonations of voice and bodily movements, if they exist when the speech is read or narrated, are a shadow of those originally performed by the orator. Similarly, the account of how a speech was delivered shares with the reading of a speech the lack of that heightened anticipation, intensity and expectation of an actual performance. Yet not all is lost. True, the "attraction" and the "stimulus" mentioned by Pliny are not present in a reading or in a report of a speech, but part of what is missing from a live performance can be retrieved by what can be read between the lines of an account of an oratorical display.

This is precisely the aim of this book: to explore what narrations of

rhetorical performances from late antique sources can offer us in order to improve our understanding of the issues relating to cultural and religious debates of that time period. By narrating either their own or their antagonists' performances, late antique authors wrote accounts of rhetorical performances to promote their own interests or to undermine their opponents' agendas. In these narrations, failure or success in the political, religious and cultural arena are frequently represented as the result of either a proficient or an incompetent rhetorical delivery that foregrounds both the linguistic and extralinguistic techniques designed to persuade and mesmerize late antique audiences.

In the texts that will be explored in this book, the triangulation of live oratorical contests (two competing speakers and the audience), and the coupling of speaker and audience in an individual rhetorical performance, are reduced to the narration of a single author that describes the highlights and downfalls of performers.² This type of narration constitutes a topos that can be found in texts throughout Antiquity and in a wide variety of literary genres. In this sense, what I contend in this work is that the exploration of these narrations has the potential to become a hermeneutics of late antique times. References to bodily gestures, expressions and voices accompanying the oratorical register of a performance call for close scrutiny as their mention usually beckons us on to pressing issues related to the author's world. As will be shown in the analysis of texts by Themistius, Gregory of Nazianzus and Synesius of Cyrene in [chapter 2](#), the appropriation of cultural values, accusations of heresy and the validity of philosophical programs were frequently presented in the guise of oratorical criticism. This type of narrative is felt with an even stronger intensity in the corpus of the sophist Libanius of Antioch, whose works are a true atlas of the oratorical and rhetorical world of the fourth century AD. His reports of oratorical *agones* and rhetorical performances reflect his efforts and struggles to become and to remain an influential figure in the cultural and political landscape of the Eastern part of the Empire in the second half of the century.

Consequently, narrations of rhetorical performances in late antique texts should not be dismissed as stereotyped and banal. Rather they should be approached as a heuristic category articulated so insistently within Greek and Roman sources because the practice of rhetorical performances "answered the tendency among Greek citizens to generate all forms of cultural capital through symbolic contests among citizens struggling to be seen and known as men".³ Repetitive as these narrations may seem to us because of the recurrence of certain topics, the detailed exploration of accounts of rhetorical performances from the late antique period will help dispel the potential sense of *déjà vu* that they could engender in the mind of the reader. A common concern, for instance, in this type of narrative is the assimilation of the ethos

of cultural elites to the morally inferior figure of the actor. However, this theme did not have the same implications in Cicero's circle as it did in the agenda of a late antique philosopher like Themistius.

Therefore a whole array of nuances and shades of difference will emerge the moment we approach these texts with the attention they deserve. Either in the shape of portrayals of actual performances or narrated as rivalries between *pepaideumenoí*, these scenes reflect the growing importance of being in the spotlight in a society in which competition was a prevailing ideal that demanded constant effort from late antique elites in order to construct their public personae.⁴ This notion of competition had been an unmistakable characteristic of ancient Greek society, which was persistently manifested in a performance culture that also loomed large in late antique society,⁵ where the ideal of a successful career in the cultural and political milieus was partly imagined as the result of increasing one's presence in the public scene.⁶ Therefore, the taste for oratorical contests resulting from the ever-present agonistic element that pervaded Greco-Roman culture paired very well with the debates and disputes in which late antique *pepaideumenoí* were involved.

However, the copious presence of accounts of rhetorical performances in late antique literature has been largely overlooked in modern scholarship. In recent decades, the importance of the performative dimension of Greek rhetoric from previous periods has been explored with particular emphasis on its role in both rhetorical and non-rhetorical domains. Strategies of self-presentation, the creation of cultural communities, sexual identities and the political allegiances of elites have been the principal themes addressed by modern scholars when analyzing accounts of rhetorical performances. Thus, Gunderson's fear that "oratory as practice and performance tends to be neglected, or treated only as an afterthought, both in the canonical texts of antiquity and in much modern scholarship on ancient rhetoric"⁷ has been tempered by the appearance of studies on the importance of rhetorical delivery in Imperial literature, particularly in the context of the Second Sophistic. The underlying assumptions of these works converge on the same point: rhetorical performances were not only displays of oratorical *savoir faire* but also functioned as a tool for demonstrations of authority, as well as a platform for the discussion of social, cultural and political values.⁸

Unfortunately, this fruitful line of research begins to fade as we come closer to late antique times and to works produced in the context of the Third Sophistic. Even though the differences and correspondences between late antique texts and their literary predecessors have been identified, the analysis of narrations of rhetorical performances, reflecting the conditions of the third to the sixth centuries, remains largely uncharted for several reasons.⁹ To begin with, the premise that the dynamics and implications of rhetorical

performances were the same in Late Antiquity as in previous centuries has prevailed for a long time. This assumption should be questioned, since the cultural, political and religious conditions of those periods differed greatly. This should make an impact in turn on the scholarly consensus which regards rhetorical performances as a mechanism for the construction of the social image of the self. In relation to this, the challenges posed by the Christianization of the Empire, an event that entailed the integration of various cultural and religious constituents into a different discourse, has added new difficulties (and opportunities) to the task of analyzing the accounts of late antique rhetorical performances. Finally, exploring in detail the overwhelming number of sources which survive from Late Antiquity is an obstacle that is difficult to overcome. In addition, a great number of these accounts are not translated or properly edited to high philological standards.¹⁰ It is unsurprising, then, that a reassessment of late antique literature and rhetoric has been called for in order to respond to the questions which arise from the dynamics of rhetorical performances in an unstable time period.¹¹

It should be noted from the start that in this work I do not intend to reconstruct how pieces of late antique oratory were actually delivered.¹² With similar words and an analogous spirit to Pliny's letter at the beginning of this introduction, O. Taplin's appraisal of our understanding of Greek tragedy can be extended to the study of oratorical displays in Late Antiquity: "we miss the tone of voice, nuance, pace, stress; and we miss facial expression, gesture and the physical posture and the positioning of the speaker and addressee".¹³ But when it comes to narrations of rhetorical performances in late antique literature we are offered a privileged insight into the authors' tenets and agendas thanks to the description of rhetorical styles, the use of non-verbal elements, and the circumstances in which a speech was delivered. Such narrations can be approached as semiotically fruitful texts that, more often than not, accommodate subtexts addressed to pressing issues of the period.¹⁴

Accordingly, it is my intention to go beyond the anecdotal aroma in which the accounts of rhetorical performances are steeped in order to ascertain what they actually meant to convey in the context of late antique cultural, political and religious disputes.¹⁵ In [chapter 2](#), for instance, I will make the case that Themistius' attacks against showy orators had more to do with his interest in the advancement of his political career than with a collegial inclination for rhetorical advice. Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus' condemnation of bishops with a penchant for bombastic performances was an important part of his religious agenda. The strongly biased elements of these texts demand a literary and historical analysis capable of enabling us to look into the religious and social transformations that late antique society underwent without being misled by the narrators' self-interest. In this sense, modern scholarship has

recently turned its attention to dialogues and biographies, two literary genres not entirely unrelated to the dynamics and significance of rhetorical performances, in that the content of the texts should not be taken at face value but understood as narrative constructions in the service of personal agendas.¹⁶ Therefore, shedding light on accounts of rhetorical performances will be particularly useful in determining how an author wanted to generate his own image as well as those of others in his attempts to construct reality on his own terms.

In the following pages, rhetoric and oratory are understood as the symbiotic branches of the art of persuasion.¹⁷ There are, of course, differences between these terms but the use of “rhetorical performances” and “oratorical performances” throughout this work will refer to the act of delivering a speech in front of an audience. Therefore, they will serve as a designator to cover a wide range of speech acts and oratorical displays in which delivery tactics and techniques deriving from *hypókrisis* or *actio/pronuntiatio* (respectively the Greek and Roman terms for “rhetorical delivery, performance”) were articulated.¹⁸ From declamations and extempore orations to epideictic speeches, school exercises, Imperial addresses, homilies, or rhetorical *agones*, late antique narrations of this type of “highly somatic form of communication”¹⁹ contained references to elements present in theoretical treatments of *hypókrisis* or *actio/pronuntiatio* and, in a broader sense, in the notion of performance. In fact, as Serafim has rightly underlined, “performance is a protean notion, elusive in meaning and with a wide range of applications”.²⁰

My understanding of rhetorical performances in Late Antiquity will also engage with James Fredal’s definition of rhetorical performances as a cultural practice comprising a cluster of values within a cultural or a religious paradigm in which an individual and a community interacted.²¹ Rhetorical performances, therefore, will be considered not only as a calculated means of persuasion whose elements were codified in rhetorical treatises. More importantly, narrations of these performances can be regarded as instruments of self-presentation encompassing verbal and non-verbal strategies deployed to advance the agendas of elites.²² In this sense, they were used as markers of identity that invited conscious manipulation of one’s own image as well as that of others by capitalizing on highly biased accounts of how messages were oratorically conveyed at public speaking occasions and oratorical displays. As the sociologist Erving Goffman put it in his influential study on social interaction and communication strategies,

we should not analyse performances in terms of mechanical standards, by which a large gain can offset a small loss, or a large weight a smaller one. Artistic imagery would be more accurate, for it prepares us for the fact that a single note off key can disrupt the tone

It is precisely the presence of that “single note off key” which endows late antique narrations of rhetorical performances with the ability to vividly illustrate disputes and disagreements concerning political, social and religious issues in the form of rhetorical and oratorical criticism. This is why, throughout this book, particular attention will be paid to narrations of unsuccessful rhetorical performances, understanding “unsuccessful” as the inappropriate or deficient use of some of the elements of an oratorical performance. The wrong use of stylistic effects, the misuse of bodily gestures, the inappropriate tone of voice to declaim a specific part of a speech, the disorderly internal organization of the arguments, or the failure to memorize the speech were all indicative of a speaker’s failure to master oratory. The relevance of these flaws transcended the performative dimension of speeches and pointed to a failure in the transmission of the speaker’s message that led to a rupture with his audience. As Whitmarsh put it,

the role of the audience, however, was not simply to analyze language and intellectual content, but also to scrutinize the sophist’s physical person. The body was the principal site of the issues, and the anxieties, that clustered around sophistic performance.²⁴

This interest in highlighting the authors’ accounts of his peers’ and opponents’ oratorical fiascos is also explained by the very nature of the sources. Ancient authors devoted very little time to describing and commenting on their own performances, while praise and critique of the performances of one’s peers in different types of oratorical practices were far more common. In this sense, a recent publication on performance studies has stated that “it is extremely rare to find a speaker commenting explicitly on aspects of his own performative style”.²⁵ It should also be borne in mind that putting into good practice the dicta of rhetorical theorists in the hope of delivering a speech successfully was a far from easy task.²⁶ These factors help explain why it was very frequently the case that sophists, philosophers or bishops based their literary strategies on drawing the attention of their audiences to “a feature of the opponent’s appearance ... claiming that it demonstrates the opponent’s reprehensible character and his guilt”.²⁷

Whereas allusions to conformity to elements codified in rhetorical textbooks are scarce, the list of *vitia orationis* (or, as Bers put it, *evitanda*)²⁸ deviating from canonized practices of rhetoric is long and relates to the issues of the period. In late antique texts we are presented with the tiring histrionics of the dilettantes that populated the cultural arena as well as magic spells cast to ruin a rival’s performance in public *agones*. In the accounts of these performances, sophists are shown competing with each other to gain the applause of the audience, curry favor with influential figures or trying to overcome stage

fright while declaiming. Philosophers, in turn, are portrayed quarrelling among themselves in order to advance their views on the role of philosophy in society. Similar examples can be found in Christian texts. A number of priests and bishops are presented as desperately craving their flocks' applause regardless of the accuracy of their interpretation of the Scriptures, preaching in a sophisticated and theatrical manner. By following the sources' presentation of these performances as fiascos and jarring displays of failed eloquence, I hope to show the value of reports of oratorically flawed performances and of *vitia orationis* as rhetorical deviations that were meant to signal an anomaly not only within the rhetorical canon but also in terms of cultural habits.²⁹ The emphasis on the study of a "rhetoric of anti-rhetoric", to put it in Hesk's terms,³⁰ is therefore based on the idea that pointing to others' oratorical and rhetorical flaws and mistakes served as a vehicle for self-promotion by drawing the audience's attention to the interruption in the transmission of a message or a set of values on the performer's side.

Most of the texts surveyed in this book have been drawn from the works of fourth and fifth-century AD authors. Although this is not the place to deal with the extremely relevant yet unresolved question of religious labels in Late Antiquity, I would like to give a brief justification of my usage of the terms "pagan" and "Christian". Both words have been used as umbrella terms in order to cover a wide and heterogeneous variety of religious groups. In the case of "pagan", it is a label created and mostly used by Christians entailing contradictions and inaccuracies that would normally preclude its use. However, as current scholarship reveals, the alternative terminology to "pagan" (e.g., "Hellenes", "polytheist") only makes things more complicated. I concur with C.P. Jones when he estimates that "'Paganism' is potentially misleading, but less so than the alternatives that have been proposed". In the same vein but with a more optimistic view on the possibilities of the word "pagan", Watts advocates its use, thus following Alan Cameron's unapologetic endorsement of the term: "in most cases 'pagan' is the simplest, most familiar, and most appropriate term, and I make no further apology for using it".³¹ No less problematic is the term "Christian", which falls short of acknowledging the different and even contradictory creeds designated by it.³² If approaching religious identities as stable and fixed constructs has now given way to new historiographical models,³³ establishing clear-cut literary and cultural models based on religious affinities must likewise be deemed an unreliable criterion.³⁴ An appreciation of the value of the content and form of Classical *paideia* was shared by both pagans and Christians alike.³⁵ In the context of this cultural continuum, the interaction among the authors whose works are explored in this book was fluid as they belonged to the same cultural background and, in some cases, came to maintain personal and professional relationships. In this

book, therefore, I will follow Urbano's motivation in using the terms "pagan" and "Christian" as "an intracultural differentiation, rather than intercultural differentiation".³⁶

Competition for the maintenance of social influence and prestige, as well as for the advancement of different cultural and religious programs, was the main issue with which the narrations of rhetorical performances were engaged in late antique literature. But in order to fully understand the implications of these accounts, it is first necessary to become acquainted with the theory and practice of rhetorical delivery in the Greco-Roman world. Consequently, in the first chapter of the book ("Theory and Practice of Rhetorical Performance from Classical Antiquity to Imperial Times"), I will look into how *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* were systematized in ancient rhetorical theory.³⁷ Although these concepts were mentioned and dealt with in the most influential works and treatises on rhetoric both in Greek and in Latin, Quintilian's book XI of his *Institutio Oratoria* remains the most comprehensive source on the particulars of rhetorical performance that has come down to us. The majority of the theoretical precepts on *hypókrisis* and *actio* share a notable concern for the clear delimitation of the boundaries of rhetorical performances in order to avoid overlaps with other forms of performativity – especially with acting. In the second part of this chapter I will offer an overview of some of the most relevant narrations of rhetorical performances in Greco-Roman literature in order to ascertain what topics these accounts addressed. Previous literary models worked as subtexts upon which narrations of rhetorical performances in Late Antiquity capitalized, so this outline will be relevant for the purposes of this book given the palimpsestic nature of late antique literature.

The next chapter ("Charlatans, Philosophers and Philostratean Bishops in Late Antique Literature") will aim to describe the rhetorical scene of the fourth century AD and to provide a first approach to the main issues that revolved around the narrations of rhetorical performances from that period. Inclusion and exclusion from cultural and religious communities, as well as the construction of public personae, were concerns expressed through accounts of oratorical displays. Particular attention will be paid to the late antique philosophical texts that dealt with these themes by exploring the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. As thorny as in Plato's times, the tension between these two disciplines was at the core of the writings of two fundamental figures of the period, the philosophers Themistius and Synesius, the latter of whom was also bishop of Cyrene. An analysis of some of their texts will help us understand the extent to which reports of bombastic rhetorical performances played a major role in their exploration of the relation between rhetoric and philosophy. It will also shed light on their efforts to avoid undesired associations between the figure of the philosopher and of other

characters in the public scene such as actors. Turning to the Christian milieu, while it is true that our knowledge of the adaptation of secular rhetoric to the early and late antique Christian discourse has clearly improved in recent decades, studies on the relevance of rhetorical performances in a Christian context are still missing.³⁸ Textbooks composed for the formation of priests, together with references to the inappropriate use of oratorical techniques scattered in homilies, letters and orations, very frequently contained instructions for Christian elites on how to accommodate the pagan rhetorical legacy in their teaching and preaching. Given the ubiquitous presence of oratorical performances in ecclesiastical and religious practices, these works endeavored to sketch out the figure of the ideal Christian orator by offering advice on how to bridge the divergences between what Christian texts dictated regarding oratorical strategies and what late antique audiences expected to hear and see from their spiritual leaders. This topic greatly concerned Gregory of Nazianzus, who frequently equated bad oratory with religious dissension. The risks of unwanted associations also arose in the Christian milieu, in which garrulous figures whose oratory was designed to please audiences instead of providing spiritual comfort were soon assimilated to heretics and pagan sophists.

The third chapter (“*All the World’s a Stage: Libanius’ Life as a Rhetorical Performance*”) is entirely dedicated to Libanius of Antioch. The fact that his works contain an abundance of narrations of rhetorical performances, and the centrality of his figure in the late antique cultural arena, justify his selection as the main case study in this book. His oeuvre can be considered a compendium of the cultural, political and religious atmosphere of his times. In fact, his letters, speeches, declamations and school exercises soon became rhetorical models that persisted throughout Byzantine times. Few topics, no matter how trifling they may seem to us, are absent from his letters and orations. It comes as no surprise that his reports of rhetorical performances contain a wide range of subject matter. The first pages of this chapter will be devoted to contextualizing the importance and reception of Libanius’ activities as a teacher of rhetoric and as a sophist. From tips to improve his students’ performative skills to his reactions at their defections from his school to his stratagems to defeat peers, these texts will offer us a view of the role of *hypókrisis* in the late antique cultural milieu. His *Autobiography* (*Or. 1*) will take center stage in the main section of this chapter. It would be impossible to deal in detail with the breadth of all the themes addressed in this oration as it is a multi-layered text composed at different stages of his life. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the accounts of rhetorical performances which served Libanius as the templates against which his agenda was developed. Meant to showcase a ubiquitous cultural figure, these accounts are deeply biased and,

occasionally, may seem as spiritless as Pliny's reading of his speech. Nevertheless, delving into the "imaginability of his performances"³⁹ will prove, I believe, a rewarding scholarly effort in order to understand the use of a widely used topos in late antique literature.

Notes

- 1 Translation taken from Radice (1969).
- 2 On the concept of triangulation in rhetorical contexts, see Papaioannou; Serafim and da Vela (2017: 1).
- 3 Fredal (2006: 26). Roisman's definition of oratorical *agones* (2005: 67) should also be borne in mind in this context: "Contests (singular, *agōn*) of various sorts were a legitimate and valued means of proving men's worth, increasing their honor and prestige, and, no less important, putting their defeated rivals to shame".
- 4 Van Hoof (2013) is a vital reference to understand the relevance of the ideal of competition among late antique elites. For a philosophical approach to the concept of "rivalry" in the Greco-Roman world, see Gill (2003). On the performance and display of *paideia* in Imperial times, see Lauwers (2011).
- 5 Barker (2009: 2–19); Goldhill (1999: 2–3). Taplin (1999: 33) describes Athenian society of the Classical period as "extraordinarily performanceful". See also Hawhee's (2004: 16) stance on the study of the agonistic nature of the ancient Greek culture: "an aim of this exploration, though, is less to consider agonism's teleological, victory-driven side, and more to the foreground the agonistic encounter itself. For rhetoric, this encounter-gathering side of *agōn* constitutes the more pervasive agonal dynamic".
- 6 Cameron (2014: 23); Criboire (2007: 229–231); Leyerle (2001: 49–50).
- 7 Gunderson (2000: 2).
- 8 The literature on this topic is extensive: Anderson (1986: 43); Borg (2004: 157); Bremmer (1992: 27); Corbeill (2004: 111–117); Díez (2003); Edwards (2013); Eshleman (2012); Gleason (1995: 166–167, 1998); Gunderson (2000: 87); Katsourēs (1989³); Korenjak (2000); Papaioannou, Serafim and da Vela (2017); Stehle (1997: 71–169); Van Hoof (2010: 211–212).
- 9 Kennedy (2003).
- 10 An example can be found in Greenwood (2016).
- 11 Van Hoof (2010: 219–220): "late antique literature is still waiting for its Maud Gleason, its Thomas Schmitz, or its Tim Whitmarsh to carry out such an examination". See also Johnstone (2001: 123).
- 12 Fredal (2001: 255, 256–257): "Any attempt to reconstruct rhetorical action based on theories of delivery or texts of the speech can be provisional and partial at best ... Scholarly consideration of the speech has thus focused exclusively on the question of whether the speech was actually delivered. This perspective remains tied to a view of delivery as an appendage, a final element dependent on an already finished text (and, if not finished, therefore not delivered). But the more interesting question arises out of evidence of the speech's imaginability, seeing rhetorical action as a constitutional feature of the speech throughout the composing process". An attempt to reconstruct a theatrical performance can

be found in Green (2002). Vatri's opinion (2017) that a comprehensive morphosyntax analysis of the texts can help us reconstruct some gestures of a performance should not be overlooked.

13 Taplin (2003²: 2).

14 Van Nuffelen (2014c: 301) correctly notes that "the 'rhetorical' subject of a speech can differ substantially from its 'real' subject". For a brief overview on the different scenarios in which delivery was involved, see Katsourēs (1989³: 15–20).

15 Recent contributions to the study of late antique literature have shown that the dynamics of cultural and religious disputations were an integral element of numerous debates in the establishment of cultural and religious orthodoxy in which both form and content were equally important. See, for instance, Cameron (2014: 15–17); Lim (1995); Van Nuffelen (2014a).

16 See especially Cameron (2014); Urbano (2013); Van Hoof (2014: 38); Van Nuffelen (2014b).

17 See Schenkeveld (2007: 25–26); Berry and Heath (1997: 393).

18 On declamations and other oratorical forms as literary genres, see Johansson (2006: 15). Also Russell (1983: 4). Pernot (2006) has broadened the scope of the concept and has claimed the importance of the rhetorical dimension of religious acts such as prayers and hymns.

19 Vatri (2017: 318). See also Schmitz (1999: 75).

20 Serafim (2017: 15).

21 Fredal (1998: 3, 12–13). See also Goffman (1971: 26–27).

22 See Bergmann's complaint (1999: 9) of those philologists whose "text-centered readings tend to neglect the essential role of physical sites, special effects, choreography, props and visual representations".

23 Goffman (1971: 60).

24 Whitmarsh (2005: 24–25).

25 Kremmydas; Powell and Rubinstein (2013: 3). See also Cole (1991: ix); Hall (2004: 146): "while Cicero had clear ideas about the kinds of gesture that the orator should *not* use, he did not apply any detailed theoretical analysis to the gestures that he *did* employ". In a similar vein, see Flower (2013: 22–23).

26 Fantham (1982: 262): "let the reader practice Quintilian's eight-point description for a calm and dignified pose as he stands waiting to address a crowd of strangers. He should stand upright, with the legs even and slightly apart (the left foot may be advanced slightly), keep his knees straight, shoulders relaxed, look serious (but not gloomy, staring, or slack), hold his arms a little away from his sides, with the left hand as prescribed above and the right extended a little in front of the *sinus*, in an unobtrusive gesture: he is now ready to begin".

27 Shapiro (2011: 1).

28 Bers (2009: 9).

29 On what audiences expected to hear, it is always important to remember Bowie's comparison (2004: 72): "like the provision of food and lodging in MacDonald's, Starbucks and Holiday Inns, a sophistic declamation might be expected to be similar in form and content wherever in the Greek world its audience was gathered". Also Hesk (1999: 207).

30 Hesk (1999).

- 31 Cameron (2011: 15–32, especially 32); Jones (2014: 1–8, especially 6); Watts (2015: 1 n.2, 6); Whitmarsh (2017: 238). Also Stenger (2014: 269–270, 279–285).
- 32 Sandwell (2007: 11).
- 33 Quiroga (2015).
- 34 Roberts (1989: 6): “aesthetic, and particularly stylistic, preferences do not follow religious affiliation”.
- 35 See Watts (2017: 17): “Most fourth- and fifth- century Alexandrian Christians and pagans did not understand religious differences in the same way that modern communities do”.
- 36 Urbano (2013: 6).
- 37 Though with a different purpose, Shi (2008: 113–136) also surveys the presence of *hypókrisis* in rhetorical treatises.
- 38 Penner and Vander Stichele (2009) are one of the few comprehensive treatments of the topic.
- 39 Tempest (2017: 176).

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1 Theory and practice of rhetorical performance from Classical Antiquity to Imperial times

Before delving into the analysis of accounts of rhetorical performances from late antique texts, it is necessary to familiarize ourselves with the technicalities of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* in the Greco-Roman tradition and how modern scholarship has approached their study. Thus, in this chapter I will first offer a brief overview of the bibliography that has dealt with this topic. Then I will examine the role and place of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* in rhetorical textbooks and treatises in order to appropriately contextualize the technical aspects of rhetorical performances that were still active in the late antique rhetorical arena. A fully comprehensive study of each author and text will not be undertaken here since their approaches to delivery were not isolated technical digressions but complex texts intertwined with ethical, philosophical and political concepts that fall out of the scope of this book. In the final section of this chapter, a review of significant instances of narrations of rhetorical performances from Homer to Imperial times will be provided as these texts highlight some of the themes and concerns reprised by and reformulated in late antique accounts of rhetorical performances.

Literature review

Scholarly works specifically devoted to studying the technical aspects of rhetorical performance are in short supply. Zucchelli's short book (1962) is probably the most meticulous analysis of the history of the term ὑποκριτής¹ and its cognates. Zucchelli, expanding on the work by Else (1959), shows the different spheres in which these terms were involved and how they evolved from their usage in the Homeric poems until they acquired new connotations in Early Christian literature. An equally ambitious undertaking is the work by Katsourēs (1989), who reviews Aristotle's and Theophrastus' treatment of *hypókrisis* and supplies examples of rhetorical performances from different

genres with particular attention to Homer and the Greek and Roman tragedians. Katsourēs' book is more descriptive than analytical, yet it is a useful resource for the diachronic study of oratorical performances. Díez Coronado's volume (2003) on the preparation and practice of oratorical performances in Roman culture is a thorough book that provides a very detailed survey of sources dealing with the theoretical aspects of rhetorical performance from Classical Antiquity until the twentieth century before offering an annotated translation of book XI.3 from Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, the largest treatment of *actio* that has come down to us from Antiquity.

Apart from those monographs on the use and meaning of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio*, other works have addressed topics in connection with those terms. The interactions between *hypókrisis* and different literary concepts in the work of Aristotle have been the object of careful consideration, as shown by the studies of Andersen (2003) and Sonkowsky (1959). Through a different approach González (2015) has related the concept of ὑποκριτής to the realm of the interpretation of prophecies and oracles in the Greek archaic world. Edwards' contribution (2013) has stressed the importance of incorporating the study of rhetorical tropes to the analysis of rhetorical performances.

The implications of rhetorical performances for the social, cultural and religious milieu of different time periods have produced numerous interdisciplinary studies.² Fredal's contribution (1998) to the fundamental role of rhetorical performances in Ancient Greek society rightly underlined the agonistic essence of rhetoric and oratory. Barker (2009) and Bers (2009) have investigated the social and political background of oratorical performances in Archaic and Classic Greece. Bremmer (1992) and Corbeill (2002; 2004) pay particular attention to the semantics of some of the constituents involved in a rhetorical performance. The books by Dugan (2005), Gleason (1995), and Gunderson (2000) are foundational studies on rhetorical display as the forum through which socially endorsed values were put to the test. The concerns about the blurry boundaries between oratory and acting are dealt with by Webb (2008) in a work that connects the growing interest in performance and theater studies with the role of rhetorical displays and their impact in an increasingly Christianized context. More recently, Serafim (2017) has surveyed the mastery of Demosthenes and Aeschines in using different facets of *hypókrisis* in order to manipulate their audiences and undermine their rival's ethos. This is a field that Shapiro (2011) had already explored by dealing with the role of physiognomics in fourth-century BC forensic oratory. It is in the context of these studies that this book aims to contribute to our knowledge about the dynamics and interpretation of rhetorical performances in late antique literature.

Theoretical approaches to rhetorical performance in Antiquity

Ancient rhetoric was the subject of numerous treatises in Antiquity that sought to define its form and scope. Although there were different divisions, the most recurrent tradition distinguished five canons of rhetoric (ἔργα τοῦ ῥήτορος in Greek, *officia oratoris* or *partes rhetorices* in Latin): invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery.³ An examination of the terminology used to refer to rhetorical performances in Greek and Latin reflects the fact that *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* were not perfectly delimited.⁴ Both terms were not distinctively defined concepts but their meaning and dimensions extended into other disciplines, which made the task of delimitating their meanings more problematic.

Hypókrisis applied to the act of performing an oratorical speech as well as to playing a part on a stage, thus underlining the blurry limits between the techniques employed in rhetorical and theatrical performances, an issue that became a widespread concern in Classical Antiquity.⁵ As for the Latin word *actio*, its sense plays host to aspects relating to public duties, judicial terminology, acting and, of course, to the delivery of a speech.⁶ But Latin also referred to delivery with the term *pronuntiatio* as Quintilian tells us (XI.3.1): “*Pronuntiatio* is called *actio* by many people. It seems to have acquired the first name from its voice-element, the second from its element of gesture ... we are free to use both names indifferently”.⁷ The overlap in the usage of both terms is explained by their occurrence in texts framed by similar contexts and by their performative character, although *pronuntiatio* featured more often in textbooks after Quintilian.⁸

One more caveat must be taken into account before exploring the sources: the numerous and different possibilities of performing the verbal and non-verbal elements involved in the practice of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* only made things more complicated. The multilayered features of the constituents of a rhetorical performance (body language, hand gestures, inflections of the voice, attire of the speaker, etc.) granted multiple methods and variables to the performance of an oratorical piece, which did not help in the task of producing a properly and specifically developed set of norms concerning rhetorical performances.⁹ Unlike the overwhelming amount of sources that we can find on other canons of rhetoric like invention and style, digressions on the technicalities of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* were not so numerous nor have they come down to us in the same way as other works dealing with rhetorical concepts. As Irvine put it, “the *artes* tradition did not include explicit rules for oral delivery apparently leaving them up to the classroom practice and private reading”.¹⁰ Whenever *hypókrisis* and *actio*/

pronuntiatio were discussed, the sources insisted on the harmonization of the two principal elements involved in a rhetorical delivery: mastery of the different inflections of the voice and control of the movements of the body as these were the principal instruments of the speaker to arouse emotions in the audience.¹¹

Among the Greek sources, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* contains the first exhaustive testimony on the theorization of the performative aspects of *hypókrisis*.¹² The following passage is long but it is worth reproducing as it shows one of Aristotle's main concerns and viewpoint when he approached *hypókrisis* (1403b):

hypókrisis is a matter of how the voice should be used in expressing each emotion, sometimes loud and sometimes soft and sometimes intermediate, and how the pitch accents [*tonoi*] should be intoned, whether as acute, grave, or circumflex, and what rhythms should be expressed in each case; for [those who study delivery] consider three things, and these are volume, change of pitch [*harmonia*], and rhythm. Those [performers who give careful attention to these] are generally the ones who win poetic contests; and just as actors are more important than poets now in the poetic contests, so it is in political contests because of the sad state of governments. An *Art* concerned with [the delivery of oratory] has not yet been composed, since even consideration of *lexis* was late in developing, and delivery seems a vulgar matter when rightly understood.¹³

Nevertheless, Aristotle's treatment of *hypókrisis* did not only engage with oratory. The scattered references to *hypókrisis* in his oeuvre deal with different aspects ranging from emotions to literature and language.¹⁴ Thus the philosopher integrated *hypókrisis* in his excursus on how to arouse the audience's pity by (*Rh.* 1386a32) "gestures and cries and display of feelings and generally in their acting (ὑποκρίσει)". It also played a major part in his conception of *lexis* (e.g., *Rh.* 1404a20–39; 1413b) and of issues of diction in common language (*Po.* 1457a21). The appropriate management of the voice was a matter that particularly concerned Aristotle in his *Problems*. The philosopher paid attention to issues pertaining to the physical nature of the voice (*Pr.* X.38; XI.1–3, 17–18, 21) and to its changes depending on the emotions of the speaker (*Pr.* XI.13, 15, 32, 50, 53), a subject that also drew his attention in his *Rhetoric* (1403b27–32) and was put in relation with *hypókrisis* in his *Poetics* (*Ar. Po.* 1457a).¹⁵

Despite its unsettled position in his rhetorical and philosophical system, Aristotle's awareness of the great influence that *hypókrisis* could exert on audiences (e.g., *Rh.* 1404a) made him realize its similarity to acting (*Rh.* 1404a12–16):

whenever delivery comes to be considered it will function in the same way as acting... . Acting is a matter of natural talent and largely not reducible to artistic rule (ἀτεχνότερον), but insofar as it involves how things are said [*lexis*], it has an artistic element (ἐντεχνον).

This intimation seems to betray distrust and a puzzling attitude on the impact and possibilities of *hypókrisis* in fourth-century BC society.¹⁶ In fact, Sonkowsky pointed out that Aristotle's views on *hypókrisis* repeated some of Plato's arguments about rhetoric.¹⁷

The Peripatetic School continued working on the implications of rhetorical performances, although a neat differentiation between the theatrical dimension of *hypókrisis* and its function in rhetoric and oratory remained elusive in their approach.¹⁸ Following Aristotle's interest in delivery, Theophrastus composed a treatise entitled *On Delivery* in which *hypókrisis* was not restricted to rhetoric alone but also applied to different subjects.¹⁹ Unfortunately lost to us, the influence of this work was felt in writers from different periods.²⁰ In his examination of the importance of the face and the eyes in deliveries at the end of *De Oratore*, Cicero resorts to Theophrastus as an authoritative reference on the topic (III.221).²¹ In the *Deipnosophistae*, Athenaeus includes an anecdote telling of Theophrastus' usage of extra-verbal techniques, gestures and variations of voice when he taught at his school (I.21a-b):

Hermippus says that Theophrastus used to appear at the school at his regular time, shining with oil and neatly dressed, and would then take a seat and deal with the day's topic, using every sort of gesture and expression. Once when he was imitating a glutton, he struck out his tongue and licked his lips.²²

In Late Antiquity, Athanasius – a commentator of the rhetorician Hermogenes – observed with regard to Theophrastus' idea of *hypókrisis* that

delivery is for an orator the greatest (help) in regard to persuasion. (He says this) referring to the principles and the emotions of the soul and the knowledge of these, so that the movement of the body and the pitch of the voice are in harmony with the entire science.²³

Also connected with the Peripatetic School, Demetrius of Phalerum's texts on rhetorical performances are mostly concerned with Atticism and the style of contemporary orators – especially Demosthenes.²⁴ Fragments 134–139 focus on the famous orator, whose oratorical *savoir-faire* is undermined by Demetrius' ambiguous remarks in which he confesses that he was not carried away by the orator's style. In a passage transmitted by Plutarch we are told that (fr. 137) “the majority were wonderfully pleased with his [i.e., Demosthenes] delivery but connoisseurs, Demetrius of Phalerum among them, found his style base, ignoble and feeble”.²⁵ J. Walker has interpreted this passage by pointing out that Demetrius was closer to the Isocratean ideal of the rhetor as a figure inclined to provoke thoughtful consideration of the issue at stake in his performances rather than to excite the audience's pathos, a feature for which Demosthenes was renowned.²⁶

A treatise entitled *On Style* was traditionally ascribed to Demetrius, but his

authorship has been dismissed and now modern scholarship considers this work to have been composed by another Demetrius that lived between the third century BC and the first century AD.²⁷ In this treatise orators and speakers are given tips on how to adapt the periodic style to their performances. Thus, it is stated that (20) “the form of the rhetorical period is close-knit and circular; it needs an ample utterance and a gesture which corresponds to the movements of the rhythm”.²⁸ *On Style* also suggests orators add figures of speech as they (271) “help the speaker in delivery and in debate”.

Outside of the Peripatetic tradition, *hypókrisis* also attracted the attention of philosophers from other schools. This is the case of the Epicurean Philodemus of Gadara, an influential figure in the cultural scene of the first century BC. His interests ranged from the management of properties to philosophy, emotions and theology. In relation to language, Philodemus was greatly concerned with the psychological and rhetorical mechanisms relating to the process of communication, as attested by fragments of his writings on concepts like frank speech (*parrhesia*) and flattery (*kolakeia*).²⁹ In Section II of the fourth book of his *On Rhetoric*, Philodemus listed the main elements of a rhetorical delivery (XIV^a 8): “Much of delivery is the natural and unconscious bodily expression of the emotions. Delivery depends, too, on natural endowment, beauty of voice, grace of body, self-possession”.³⁰ A great part of the section on delivery was used by Philodemus to voice his distaste for the excessively preponderant role of delivery in rhetoric, an issue he considered akin to the sophists’ fallacies who practiced the type of rhetoric that turned a blind eye to philosophy.³¹ Even though he made *hypókrisis* the cornerstone of his criticism of sophists, he acknowledged its relevance by stating that (XI^a 1) “it lends dignity to the speaker”.³²

The first Latin source to provide a theoretical reference to *actio* is the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.³³ The introductory passages of this treatise outline the tasks of a public speaker and how to succeed in delivering (*pronuntiatio*) them. For the author of the treatise, *pronuntiatio* consisted of a (I.3) “graceful regulation of the voice, countenance and gesture”.³⁴ Mastery of delivery, as well as of the rest of the *officia oratoris*, was to be achieved by means of (I.3) imitation (*imitatio*) and practice (*exercitatio*). It is in book III where performative elements such as the modulation of the voice and bodily movements are dealt with. Once the author has informed us that he considers *pronuntiatio* to be as significant as the rest of the *officia oratoris* when it comes to persuasion (III.19), he elaborates on different facets of the voice. Divided into three aspects (volume [*magnitudo*], stability [*firmitudo*] and flexibility [*mollitudo*]), the voice takes center stage on the treatment of delivery. The *Rhetorica* offers orientation on how to avoid cacophonous effects, what type of intonations should be adopted for each speaking occasion and in

which part of the speech, and how to take care of the windpipe (III.20–25). After much categorization on the tones of voice, we are left with only two paragraphs to deal with bodily movements (*motus*). The priority of the author when talking about *motus* was to avoid the likening of the facial expression and gestures of the orator to those of actors. *Motus* is defined as (26) “a certain control (*moderatio*) of gesture and mien which renders what is delivered more plausible”, and appears connected with the different types of vocal tone previously listed (26–27). For instance, for the broken tone that a speaker must adopt in a debate (27), “one must extend the arm very quickly, walk up and down, occasionally stamp the right foot, and adopt a keen and fixed look”. Consequently, the appropriate conjunction of voice and gesture is meant to secure (27) “that what the orator is saying seems to come from his heart”.

Cicero’s vast corpus is arguably the best example of what the examination of oratorical performances can offer us for the understanding of the cultural and social atmosphere of a time period.³⁵ Whereas his speeches offer us valuable insights into the state of Republican oratory, his texts on rhetoric are an invaluable aid to understanding the role of oratorical performances in the Roman political and cultural arena. In his *De Inventione* I.9, Cicero defines delivery (*pronuntiatio*) as “the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style”.³⁶ More elaborate are the suggestions that we can find in his *De Partitione Oratoria* VII.25:

it is most important for the speaker to modify his delivery [*actio*] in correspondence with the variations of his matter and also of his language. For he invests his speech with lucidity, brilliance, convincingness and charm not by his language but by changes of voice, by gestures and by glances, which will be most efficacious if they harmonize with the class of speech and conform to its effect and its variety.³⁷

Cicero’s interest in harmonizing the different constituents of *actio* responds to his stress on the importance of bodily gestures and facial expressions, which had not received much attention in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.³⁸

The broadest treatment of rhetorical performance appears in the third book of his *De Oratore*.³⁹ Having taken for granted that *actio* had the leading role in oratory, Cicero adopts a tone of *laudator temporis acti* by lamenting that the correct use of *actio* (III.214) “has been abandoned by the orators, who are the players that act real life, and has been taken over by the actors, who only mimic reality”.⁴⁰ Cicero then sets off (III.216–220) to describe how emotions, from anger to joy and fear, can be aroused by articulating different intonations and inflections of the voice, and exemplifies each case with passages from Latin drama.⁴¹ His observations on the relevance of gestures (III.220–223) pay particular attention to the central role of the eyes (III.221), “the only part of the body capable of producing as many indications and variations as there are

emotions”.⁴² Cicero ends (III.224–227) his comments on *actio* by returning to voice in order to suggest frequent changes of tone both as a means to avoid a plain delivery and to add *ornatus* to the performance (III.103).⁴³

In the stylistic judgments of orators that he puts in the mouths of the characters of the dialogue *Brutus*, *actio* was one of the most important criteria.⁴⁴ His basic assumption was that (110)

it is not enough to discern what is to be said unless you have the ability to say it fluently and with some charm; nor even is this enough unless what is said is recommended by some grace of voice, facial expression, and action.⁴⁵

Words and extralinguistic elements of communication had to concord if a speaker aimed to become a good orator. In his appraisal of M. Antonius, it is stressed that (141) “his gesture did not seek to reflect words, but agreed with the course of his thought – hands, shoulders, chest, stamp of the foot, posture in repose and in movement, all harmonizing with his words and thoughts”. The example of Gnaeus Lentulus is particularly illustrative of the importance that Cicero accorded to rhetorical performance. In spite of not being intellectually acute, articulate with words or even smart, he (234–235) “won a more favourable reputation for eloquence by his delivery than his actual ability warranted... . Lentulus by the excellence of his delivery cloaked the mediocrity of his other gifts”.

These remarks on the possibilities of *actio* as a means of persuasion were meant to be substantiated by a complete array of moral and ethical values that served Cicero in his construction of the figure of the ideal orator.⁴⁶ In *De Oratore* III.214, he clearly expressed his concern about the contamination of this ideal when it was exposed to the immoderate influence of actors:

my reason for dwelling on these points is because the whole of this department has been abandoned by the orators, who are the players that act real life, and has been taken over by the actors, who only mimic reality.

Cicero put into practice and embodied some of the rhetorical dicta that we find in his works. The cultivation of a very personal prose style and his use of clothing for purposes of constructing an identity helped him create a semiotic framework from within which he could propagate his ideology and fight his political battles.⁴⁷ In fact, there is a clearly demarcated space in modern bibliography for studies that explore Cicero’s use of oratorical performances as a criterion of political and social status.⁴⁸ Joy Connolly, for instance, has highlighted the link that Roman oratory (and, especially, Cicero) established between citizenship and rhetorical performances, while J.M. David has shown that *actio* was, in Cicero’s works, one of the yardsticks to test who was a reliable addition to the Republican political arena or a mere parvenu. Hall, in

turn, has pointed out how Cicero balanced recommendations of the use of theatrical manners with warnings against overuse of theatrical effects.⁴⁹

As towering a figure in literary criticism as Dionysius of Halicarnassus could not be absent from a survey on rhetorical and oratorical practices.⁵⁰ His remarks on the style of delivery of famous orators provide a good insight into the theoretical intricacies of rhetorical performances. Isocrates' oratorical style, for example, is criticized by Dionysius for misusing rhetorical figures to the extent that Isocrates (*Isoc.* 14) "offends the ear", and for his inability to infuse his pieces with (13) "animation and intensity of feeling". At the other end of the spectrum we find Demosthenes.⁵¹ Labeling him as (*Dem.* 22) "the most brilliant exponent" of the art of performing epitomizes Dionysius' rapturous description of the ecstatic feelings he experienced whenever he read a Demosthenic speech. Near the end of his work on Demosthenes' style, Dionysius explains that fundamental to the the orator's masterful technique was his ability to successfully adapt his emotions to the performance style (53):

his style is designed to accommodate it, being full of moral and emotional overtones, and thus dictating the form of the delivery. Accordingly, whoever recites his speeches should take special care to deliver every sentence in the manner intended by the orator; for the style itself prescribes to the susceptible reader the kind of delivery that will be required.⁵²

Dionysius goes on to exemplify the weight of the bond between *lexis* and *hypókrisis* in Demosthenes' works by quoting passages from the orator's speeches together with instructions on the tones of voice and facial expressions that would suit each text. The author of the treatise *On the Sublime* echoed Dionysius' admiration for Demosthenes, and compared his oratorical style to Cicero's in a very graphic way (12.4–5):

Our countryman [i.e., Demosthenes] with his violence, yes, and his speed, his force, his terrific power of rhetoric, burns, as it were, and scatters everything before him, and may therefore be compared to a flash of lightning or a thunderbolt. Cicero seems to me like a widespread conflagration, rolling along and devouring all around it: his is a strong and steady fire, its flames duly distributed, now here, now there, and fed by fresh supplies of fuel.⁵³

In Imperial times, the conception of oratory changed.⁵⁴ Now rhetorical textbooks were predominantly concerned with the theory of *stasis* and invention, but *actio* managed to preserve a preeminent position as the practice of declamations and oratorical performances continued, especially in the scholastic world.⁵⁵ The twelve books of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* bear testimony to this as they contain the fullest account of theoretical instructions for oratorical performances. Book eleven is, in fact, entirely devoted to the subject. Quintilian credited *actio* with an overwhelming impact in speaking occasions (XI.3.2): "The thing itself has an extraordinary force and power in

oratory. Indeed, it matters less what sort of things we have composed within ourselves than how we utter them, because people are affected according to what they hear”.⁵⁶

Among the many topics that Quintilian addressed in the *Institutio Oratoria*, preoccupation with the appropriate combination of *actio* techniques and moral values stands out. The rhetorician meant to shape the contents of a comprehensive curriculum designed to sustain the ethical and intellectual formation of orators while correcting the direction that rhetoric and oratory had taken. Quintilian was adamant in this sense (XII.1.3): “I am not only saying that the orator must be a good man, but that no one can be an orator unless he is a good man”.⁵⁷ He developed his moral approach to *actio* by connecting it with its effect on audiences and its centrality in the creation of the orator’s ethos. Quintilian’s understanding of the *sermo corporis* as an extralinguistic way of conveying information to the scrutiny of an audience meant avoiding unwanted comparisons caused by the use of bodily gestures similar to those used by the actors (XI.3.89–90):

An orator has to be very different from a dancer; he must adapt his gesture to his sense more than to his words – which indeed was the practice of the more serious actors too... . This caution applies not only to the hands, but to the whole range of gesture and voice.⁵⁸

Avoidance of theatrical manners, therefore, became essential in order to maintain a spotless reputation for the orator, untainted by association with the theater.⁵⁹

In this work, Quintilian also presented an extensive catalogue of *vitia et virtutes dicendi* accompanied by a guide on the correct use of extraverbal means of persuasion. His precise analysis of the voice, for instance, includes excursions on its nature, practice and occasion for different intonations (XI.3.15–64), while his study of the meaning of bodily gestures considers the significance of the movements from head to toe (XI.3.65–136).⁶⁰ Thorough as his instructions were, Quintilian warned about the most frequent oratorical slippages that an orator could make (XI.3.160):

Mistakes include looking at the ceiling; wiping the blushes off your face and making it look shameless; thrusting your whole face forward with assurance; bending your brows to look fiercer; pushing your hair back from the forehead unnaturally, so as to produce that terrible bristling look. It is a mistake also to do what the Greeks so often do, namely to prepare for the speech with all sorts of movements of fingers and lips; or again to clear your throat loudly; or to put one foot well in front of the other, or hold a part of your toga in your left hand; or to stand with feet apart, stiffly, leaning back, bent forward, or with shoulders hunched up to the back of the head, like a wrestler about to engage.

Quintilian’s lengthy catalogue of worries was more than justified. It was not just an orator’s reputation that was endangered if he committed one of these

mistakes; in the oratorical milieu, deficient rhetorical performances also flagged moral and ethical flaws.⁶¹

“Oratory is first and foremost a moral virtue, not a mere technique of speaking”.⁶² Gunderson’s sentence succinctly and brilliantly summarizes the implications of oratorical performances in the Roman world.⁶³ From Cato’s *vir bonus dicendi peritus* to Quintilian’s comprehensive work on the education of cultural elites, Roman oratory remained strongly linked to ethics, politics and social status, becoming the locus through which bodily gestures as well as modes of walking and speaking could convey political and cultural allegiances.⁶⁴ It is unsurprising then that the rhetorical doctrines of Cicero and Quintilian had a long-lasting influence in the Western rhetorical tradition.⁶⁵ The implication and importance of oratory in Imperial and late antique times did not diminish. Texts dealing with the technicalities and interpretation of oratory from these periods may not have been through the same process of sustained discussion as the works of Aristotle, Cicero or Quintilian. This, however, does not mean that oratorical culture lacked importance. It has been argued that superficial attention to rhetorical performance in the handbooks and *artes* composed from the second century AD onwards “suggests a declining interest in oral performance”,⁶⁶ yet scholia, compilations of rhetorical textbooks and commentaries on canonical authors composed from the second to the sixth century included references to and discussions of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio*.⁶⁷

One of the most thorough theoretical approaches to rhetorical performance is to be found in the chapter on *hypókrisis* in Cassius Longinus’ *Art of Rhetoric*, which has come down to us in a fragmentary state.⁶⁸ His approach (fr. 48.370–372) to *hypókrisis* addresses two main aspects: first, Longinus mentions that any rhetorical performance must entail the use of gestures and of different intonations of the voice which, in turn, need to be adjusted to the circumstances of the speaking occasion. Second, the emotional and psychological dimension of *hypókrisis* is emphasized as Longinus ties *hypókrisis* to the ethos of the performer and the pathos provoked in the audience. These aspects pivot around his understanding of the voice as a key element endowed with a psychagogic power. The voice, Longinus argues, must harmonize with the emotions that the speaker means to arouse (fr. 48.403–405, 426–431), with the part of the speech that is being delivered (fr. 48.433–435), and with the type of argument deployed (fr. 48.410–426). If the speaker fails and gives a poor delivery, the resultant speech is doomed to be (fr. 48.387–388) “obscure and feeble and ungracious, displeasing and harsh”.⁶⁹

Theoretical references to delivery become less frequent and less elaborate in the rest of the rhetorical treatises of the Imperial and late antique period. The *Anonymous Seguerianus* exemplifies this tendency, contributing only

occasional tips on *hypókrisis*. Influenced by the Aristotelian conception of rhetoric, its author urges speakers to (137) “control the inflection of your voice” as well as to make its modulations (138) “easy to understand and not dissident in regard to the occasion of the subject” when narrating an event or an episode. Likewise, in the section dedicated to proofs the speaker is told to (197) “fit his delivery to the style of his speech”.⁷⁰

Late antique grammarians also occupied themselves with the particularities of *actio/pronuntiatio*. In the fourth century, Aelius Donatus produced two *artes grammaticae*, although he owes his notoriety to his commentaries on five comedies by Terence dealing with the theatrical aspects of the use of gestures and vocal intonations in Terence’s comedies. Heavily influenced by Quintilian’s views on delivery, Donatus’ focus on the analysis of non-verbal elements was meant to improve the understanding of Terence’s works but, at the same time, it also helped “his students as a part of their study of Latin literature and language and their practice in rhetoric and public speaking”.⁷¹ The *Ars Rhetorica* by Julius Victor is a text with an unoriginal approach to *actio*. For Julius Victor, voice and bodily gestures are the two constituent elements of delivery. His instructions on their preparation and practice are so indebted to Cicero’s and Quintilian’s dicta that he constantly paraphrases their works. He likewise pays specific attention to the avoidance of the adoption of actors’ vocal effects and facial expressions when declaiming a rhetorical piece.⁷² Although renowned for his philosophical and religious works, Marius Victorinus also authored an *Ars Grammatica* in which scattered comments on *actio* can be found. Victorinus pays more attention to the construction of words than to their pronunciation, about which he only stated that the voice should be adapted to the audience (vol. 6, p. 188 Keil): “*Pronuntiatio quid est? Scriptorum secundum personas accomodata distinctione similitudo*”. The three books of Fortunatianus’ *Artes Rhetoricae* are presented in the form of a didactic dialogue. For him, *pronuntiatio* consisted of voice, facial expressions and gestures (III.15). The treatment of the voice is rather exhaustive, instructing the orator on the practice of physical exercises, on what food to avoid, and on what intonations he should adapt for each part of the speech (III.16–18). Regarding facial expressions, Fortunatianus highlights the expressivity of the eyes and eyebrows (III.20) and proposes what movements are best suited to the performance of the speech.

Given the centrality of orality and performance to Greco-Roman civilization, more texts on the conceptualization of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* might have been expected. If we consider the temporal gulf between the first attempts to theorize the various elements of rhetorical performances made by the Peripatetic school and the precepts codified by late antique grammarians, it is fair to state that *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio*

did not undergo a significant evolution.⁷³ What is interesting to note is that Imperial and late antique rhetoricians inherited three main concerns that had worried previous authors: the relevance and implications of stylistic theory in the context of rhetorical performances, the blurry boundaries that separated rhetorical performances from acting and the need to harmonize voice and body language in the attempt to provoke the proper emotions in the audience. These concerns remained not only unsolved but also became points of contention in the narrations of rhetorical performances in Late Antiquity.⁷⁴

Narrations of rhetorical performances in Greco-Roman literature

As mentioned in the Introduction, Greek and Roman authors were not very keen on giving accounts of their own oratorical performances. Rather they seemed to enjoy describing how rivals and antagonists failed while delivering a speech. Such accounts were composed in order to show not only that those speakers had proven themselves unsuited to the oratorical arena but, more importantly, that their deficient performances signaled their inability to meet the cultural or social standards of their time. Late antique literature, as will be shown in the following two chapters, is full of this type of narrative, in which sophists, bishops and philosophers fail to follow the theoretical doctrines on rhetorical delivery. In what follows, some of the most relevant references in Greco-Roman literature that worked as subtexts for the late antique *pepaideumenoi* will be shown.

As is the case with countless other aspects of Classical Antiquity, we can find the first example of a deficient rhetorical performance in Homer. This should not come as a surprise. M. Heath has reminded us that in Antiquity the *Iliad* was considered “a poem strikingly full of talk”,⁷⁵ much of which was presented in the form of oratorical displays. In the second book of the poem, Thersites, a common soldier, dares to question Agamemnon’s plans in front of the assembly of Achaeans. Described as (*Il.*, II.217–219) “bandy-legged and lame in one foot, and his shoulders were rounded, hunching together over his chest, and above them his head was pointed, and a scant stubble grew on it”, Thersites scolded Agamemnon and Odysseus with (*Il.*, II.222) “shrill cries” and shouts (*Il.*, II.224).⁷⁶ His speech was measureless for his mind (*Il.*, II.213–215) “was full of a great store of disorderly words, with which to revile the kings, recklessly and in no due order, but whatever he thought would raise a laugh among the Argives”. Despite producing “a polished piece of invective”,⁷⁷ Thersites was reproached and humiliated by Odysseus, who ironically mocked him for having a clear voice (*Il.*, II.246),⁷⁸ and struck him in the back and the

shoulders (*Il.*, II.265–266).

Much and varied discussion has been sparked by Thersites' intervention,⁷⁹ but for the purposes of this work it will suffice to emphasize that Thersites' intrusion pinpoints some of the common mistakes in the process of delivering a speech that eventually ended up in an oratorical fiasco in a contentious context.⁸⁰ The conjunction of his low social status, his ungraceful physique and his reckless address made his intervention a failure.⁸¹ Also, the stress on Thersites' inability to arrange his thoughts in order to give a measured speech discloses an incompetent *inventio* of his arguments.⁸² Knowing the key role given by rhetoricians to voice in *hypókrisis*, the allusions to his "shrill cries" and shouts, together with Odysseus' ironic appraisal of the soldier's clear voice were tantamount to a flawed performance. Orators and rhetoricians in Antiquity considered that Thersites' ethos discredited him from pronouncing a speech. Aeschines made use of him in one of his invectives against Demosthenes (*Or.* 3.231):

If any one of the tragic poets who are to bring on their plays after the crowning should in a tragedy represent Thersites as crowned by the Greeks, no one of you would tolerate it, for Homer says he was a coward and a slanderer; but when you yourselves crown such a man as this, think you not that you would be hissed by the voice of Hellas?⁸³

In a similar vein, Quintilian tells us that (*Inst.*, XI.1.37)

the same remark is often frank for one speaker, mad for another, arrogant for a third. Thersites' words against Agamemnon are ridiculed; but give them to Diomedes or someone of that rank, and they will seem signs of greatness of mind.

Certainly, the Classical period was another propitious context for the display of eloquence. In a brief and compelling book, Victor Bers has canvassed the most challenging performative aspects to be dealt with in fifth and fourth-century BC courtrooms. Stage fright constrained amateur and professional speakers when defending their cases in front of a jury since the fear of becoming speechless or forgetful frequently held them back in the moment of delivery.⁸⁴ Their cases could go astray if they did not speak correctly with the right tone of voice and accompanied by appropriate gestures. A great number of these slippages feature in the rivalry between Demosthenes and Aeschines, perhaps the most compelling example in Greek literature of how to turn to one's advantage the oratorical faults of one's antagonist. These two towering figures pointed their fingers at each other by criticizing and mocking their nemesis' rhetorical performances as evidence of his incompetence in defending the correct ideals in the political arena in a period in which nothing less than the leadership of Greece was at stake. When read together, the exchange of speeches between Demosthenes and Aeschines

constitutes a *vade mecum* of shrewdness in exploiting the oratorical inadequacies of an opponent in the context of a complex historical scenario.⁸⁵ Demosthenes consistently built his argument on Aeschines' unfitness to fulfill civic duties and to represent citizens given his past as an actor, which was considered to be an inadequate public role that left him unprepared for the political game.⁸⁶ Together with this recrimination, Demosthenes discredited Aeschines by playing dirty (*Or.* 18.129):

Shall I relate how your father Tromes was a slave in the house of Elpias, who kept an elementary school near the Temple of Theseus, and how he wore shackles on his legs and a timber collar round his neck? Or how your mother practiced daylight nuptials in an outhouse next door to Heros the bone-setter, and so brought you up to act in *tableaux vivants* and to excel in minor parts on the stage (τριταγωνιστής)?⁸⁷

Dishonoring Aeschines' family by accentuating his low origins and calling him τριταγωνιστής allowed Demosthenes to stress Aeschines' relation with the tragic stage.⁸⁸ These arguments were furthered in his *On the Crown* by contrasting his duty as an orator committed to his fellow citizens with Aeschines' alleged fixation with showing off his vocal skills and theatrical manners (*Or.* 18.277–280):

if I do possess any skill in speaking, you will all find that that skill has always been exercised on public concerns and for your advantage, never on private occasions and to your detriment... . It really makes me think, Aeschines, that you deliberately went to law, not to get satisfaction for any transgression, but to make a display of your oratory.⁸⁹

Likewise, in *On the False Embassy* Demosthenes censured Aeschines for imitating the gestures of a statue of Solon that has been (*Or.* 19.251) “set up to exemplify the self-restraint of the popular orators of that generation”, but Aeschines had failed to adapt (*Or.* 19.252) “what, politically, would have been much more profitable than an attitude, – a view of Solon's spirit and purpose, so widely different from his own”.⁹⁰

Closely following a similar line of argument, Aeschines constructed his accusation against Timarchus, an ally of Demosthenes whose rhetorical performance was full of indecorous gestures that had failed to meet the oratorical standards set by illustrious statesmen (*Or.* 1.25–26):

And so decorous were those public men of old, Pericles, Themistocles, and Aristides (who was called by a name most unlike that by which Timarchus here is called), that to speak with the arm outside the cloak, as we all do nowadays as a matter of course, was regarded then as an ill-mannered thing, and they carefully refrained from doing it ... this man not long ago, yes, only the other day, in an assembly of the people threw off his cloak and leaped about like a gymnast, half naked, his body so reduced and befouled through drunkenness and lewdness that right-minded men, at least, covered their eyes, being ashamed for the city, that we should let such men as he be our advisers.⁹¹

Aeschines also reproached Demosthenes' criticism of his own style and natural oratorical skills when the latter was, in fact (*Or.* 3.229),

a man who is made up of words, and those words bitter words and useless – when such a man takes refuge in 'simplicity' and 'the facts', who could have patience with him? If you treat him as you might a clarinet, and take out his tongue, you have nothing left!⁹²

In this context, it is no surprise that Aeschines took the opportunity to enjoy himself by telling his audience how Demosthenes had suffered severe stage fright in the embassy before Philip of Macedonia. Aeschines masterfully narrates this fiasco. First, he builds the momentum (*Or.* 2.34): "at last came Demosthenes' turn to speak. All were intent, expecting to hear a masterpiece of eloquence". Aeschines adds a patronizing and humiliating tone to note the moment in which Demosthenes could not get on with his proemium (*Or.* 2.35):

Philip saw his plight and bade him take courage, and not to think, as though he were an actor on the stage, that his collapse was an irreparable calamity, but to keep cool and try gradually to recall his speech, and speak it off as he had prepared it.

However, Demosthenes could not continue, and thus Aeschines concludes the report by solemnly declaring that (*Or.* 2.35) "silence followed; then the herald bade us withdraw".

His oratorical skirmishes with Aeschines did not stop Demosthenes from becoming the quintessential paradigm of oratory in Antiquity.⁹³ As the protagonist of countless stories of dubious veracity, his name was synonymous not only with rhetorical proficiency but also with ways to improve performative skills, given that his successful career had been achieved in spite of the fact that nature had not bestowed him with oratorical abilities. It is in Plutarch's account of Demosthenes' life that we can appreciate the magnitude of his figure as a self-made orator. Demosthenes, we are told, had to overcome the problems that an ungifted physique brought to him (*Dem.* 4) and his early failures in the oratorical arena (*Dem.* 6). After that, he toiled to polish his style (*Dem.* 8, 11) and trained with the actor Satyrus to work on his oratorical dexterity (*Dem.* 7). His efforts and sacrifices ended up making him the fierce enemy of Philip of Macedonia (*Dem.* 20). Quintilian echoes a spurious anecdote that epitomizes how important *hypókrisis* was for Demosthenes: when asked to describe the most important element in oratory, Demosthenes (XI.3.6) "gave the prize to delivery, and he gave it the second and the third place too, until they stopped asking".⁹⁴

In the Roman world, Cicero's *Brutus* provides a detailed survey of the oratorical style of numerous Roman orators. Sulpicius, for example, deserves praise for his ability to balance the adequate integration of theatrical effects into the oratorical milieu (203): "His voice was strong and at the same time

pleasing and of brilliant timbre; his gesture and bodily movement extraordinarily graceful, but with a grace that seemed made for the forum rather than for the stage". Admiration for Caesar's performance abilities are also mentioned since he (261) "in respect of voice, gesture, and the speaker's whole physique, possesses a certain noble and high-bred quality".⁹⁵ At the other end of the spectrum we find Appuleius Saturninus, who (224)

seemed to be the best speaker, though he took the fancy of the public rather by externals, such as his action or even his dress, than by any real faculty of expression or of sound sense, with which he was but meagerly endowed.

Cicero also details the oratorical pitfalls that could endanger the success of an orator. An unmistakable sign of failure would emerge if judges were seen (200) "yawning, talking to a fellow judge, sometimes even gossiping in a group, sending out to learn the time, asking the presiding judge to adjourn the court". Marcus Calidius' lack of impetus and skills to harmonize the emotions that he should have provoked with the gestures of his delivery were used against him in order to show how unconvincing he was (278):

What trace of anger, of that burning indignation, which stirs even men quite incapable of eloquence to loud outbursts of complaint against wrongs? But no hint of agitation in you, neither of mind nor of body! Did you smite your brow, slap your thigh, or at least stamp your foot? No. In fact, so far from touching my feelings, I could scarcely refrain from going to sleep there and then.

Scribonius Curio's style, as described by Cicero (216), epitomized the absolute fiasco of an orator as he failed in all the *officia oratoris* (216):

Now in the case of Curio we may conclude with singular truth that an orator wins commendation by no one thing so much as by the excellence and wealth of his diction; for in invention he was slow and in arrangement disorderly. There remain two points, action and memory, for both of which he evoked the laughter and ridicule of his audience. His action was of a kind which Gaius Julius branded once for all, when as Curio was reeling and swaying his whole body from side to side, he asked: 'Who is the fellow there talking from a skiff?'

It is hard to overemphasize the central place that oratory occupied in the cultural scene of Imperial times. Its articulation in a new political landscape encouraged philosophical reflections about the place of oratory and rhetoric in a society dominated by codes and cultural patterns different from those that saw those disciplines flourish.⁹⁶ It is not only that the culture of *agones* did not decrease in Imperial times but it even expanded into other fields. Galen, a polymath who stood out as one of the greatest physicians of Antiquity, described some of his diagnoses and operations in the guise of oratorical *agones* against doctors from rival medical schools with the intention of

mesmerizing his audience.⁹⁷ Still, the majority of testimonies of rhetorical performances from Imperial times are connected to the Second Sophistic movement.⁹⁸ Satires on the ubiquity of rhetorical performances in the period were a favorite theme of one of the best representatives of the Second Sophistic, Lucian of Samosata, who resorted to them in order to caricature the cultural atmosphere of a time in which philosophers and sophists frequently complemented their theoretical training in rhetoric with eye-catching and provocative artistry.⁹⁹ In Lucian's *Professor of Rhetoric*, for example, a young student of rhetoric is advised to take shortcuts in his learning by disdaining hard work and by incorporating all sorts of rhetorical fireworks and theatrical manners to impress audiences.

Another important representative figure of Imperial literature, Aelius Aristides, took pride in boasting of his successful career and the multitudes that attended his performances. In one of his accounts, we are told that an Egyptian competitor had managed to gather only seventeen people to attend his performance, a ridiculous number when compared to the crowd that received Aristides at the Council where he was to deliver an oration. Aristides confesses that he was just following the mandates given to him in a dream (*Or.* 51.31): "I dreamed that I saw the sun rising from the market place, and had on my lips, 'Aristides will declaim today in the Council Chamber at ten o'clock'"¹⁰⁰ His successful delivery was met with the enthusiasm of the crowd that had packed the Council (*Or.* 51.33) and that, by comparison, ridiculed the poor attendance at his rival's performance. Aristides was happy to have taught his Egyptian rival a lesson since the latter started to practice "moderation" (σωφροσύνη), as he had learned a lesson after competing with Aristides (*Or.* 51.34). The sophist explained why he narrated this episode (*Or.* 51.34): "nor would I have mentioned these things, if I had not wished to show how clearly my dream came to pass and that god also had a care for these things". Besides the narcissistic component of the passage, the narration of his oratorical duel against the Egyptian allowed Aristides to consolidate his belief in the power of the oneric phenomena that he usually experienced.

Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* is the work from the Imperial period that provides the most comprehensive panorama of oratory.¹⁰¹ Bristling with accounts of bombastic performances, it provides us with relevant information on technicalities related to delivery. Issues connected to the use of the voice (*VS* 492, 496, 505, 513, 516, 522, 620), memorization of speeches (*VS* 495, 523, 541, 604), physical appearance (*VS* 485, 570), facial and bodily gestures (*VS* 519, 528, 533, 618) and clothing (*VS* 513) enrich the records of rhetorical displays in which successful performances alternate with blatant fiascos. In this work, we are given a picture of sophists who competed in oratorical contests to determine who was the most gifted orator, who was quickest when it came to

witticisms, or who was the best at impersonating fictional or historical characters from Greek history. These sophists became famous stars of this period, but their success came at a price. They had to practice and memorize long speeches. Yet the most challenging part was when they had to victoriously perform in front of big audiences. Failure was not a trivial issue since professional prestige was at stake; if unsuccessful, a sophist could face the risk of cultural ostracism and loss of status among the *pepaideumenoi*.

Philostratus' narrative includes anecdotic passages that underline the excessive attention to non-verbal elements in the oratorical performances of the sophists that populated his work. A telling example is the embassy sent to the emperor Antoninus in which the sophist Alexander of Seleucia (nicknamed "Clay-Plato") participated. Rumor has it that Alexander was so overanxious to attract Antoninus' attention that he exclaimed (VS 571) "Pay attention to me, Caesar". Antoninus' reply disarmed him (VS 571): "I am paying attention, and I know you well. You are the fellow who is always arranging his hair, cleaning his teeth, and polishing his nails, and always smells of perfume".¹⁰² Similarly, the sophist Philiscus, who held the chair of rhetoric in Athens, also suffered an impetuous reply from Caracalla: when Philiscus was summoned to court in Rome (VS 623)

he gave offence by his gait, he gave offence by the way in which he stood, his attire seemed far from suitable to the occasion, his voice effeminate, his language indolent and directed to any subject rather than to the matter in hand.

The emperor could not refrain but exclaimed "His hair shows what sort of man he is, his voice what sort of orator!" Philiscus' disastrous performance caused him to be deprived of the immunity that came with his position in Athens. Lack of success was also at the end of the road when a sophist overexploited his catalogue of declamatory themes. This is what happened to Philagrus of Cilicia. Known for his clumsiness when it came to gaining the *captatio benevolentiae* of audiences by composing poor proemia to his declamations, he was tricked by the students of Herodes Atticus (with whom he had had a quarrel) into repeating an allegedly extempore declamation that he had actually delivered previously and which had even been published. As soon as Philagrus started to "improvise", Herodes' students began to read out loud the declamation (VS 579–580).¹⁰³

There are, of course, many more examples in the Greco-Roman anecdotal repertoire of triumphal performances, rhetorical fiascos and oratorical slippages. This sample has simply aimed to show the most frequent topics that were mentioned in narrations of rhetorical performances. Slippages in technical aspects of a performance (bodily movements, the intonation of the voice, the gaze, etc.), the concern about overlaps with the theater and the

construction of the ideal orator were issues that were to be repeated and reshaped in the accounts of oratorical performances in late antique literature, as will be shown in the following chapters.

Notes

- 1 On the different meanings of this term, see LSJ⁹ and Schamp (1987).
- 2 Comments and references to *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* can be found in Berry and Heath (1997); Blank (1995); Calboli (1994); David (1983a); Edwards (2013); Fantham (2002); Graf (1991). See also Serafim (2017: 1–6, 15–17), who offers a panorama of performance studies with particular attention to their involvement with theater.
- 3 See *Rhetorica ad Herennium* I.3; Cice. *De Or.* 1.XXXI.142. See also Díaz Díaz (2000).
- 4 See Díez Coronado (2003: 13, 37–38); Edwards (2013: 15–16); Wöhrle (1990); Zucchelli (1962: 65–73). For a brief overview of the use of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* in different spheres, see Konstan (2016).
- 5 See Else (1959) and Zucchelli (1962: 29–65) for the use of *hypókrisis* in theatrical and poetical contexts.
- 6 L&S (1984). See also Fantham (2002: 362–363).
- 7 Translation taken from Russell (2001).
- 8 See also Zucchelli (1962: 68 n. 38). For a brief discussion on the entries of *actio* and *pronuntiatio* in several Latin dictionaries, see Díez Coronado (2003: 22 n. 13).
- 9 Díez Coronado (2003: 38).
- 10 Irvine (1994: 73). For a list of lost works on different aspects of rhetoric based on information from the *Suda* from the Classical period until the Imperial times, see Haase (2011: 18–28).
- 11 For a literature review on the importance of gestures and management of the voice in rhetoric, see Fredal (1998: 6–9). For a comprehensive study of the voice, see Schulz (2014).
- 12 On the possibility of instruction on delivery by sophists in fifth-century Athens, see De Martino (1995: 35) and Johnstone (2001: 124–126). Aristotle (and also Plato in *Phdr.* 267c-d) tells us (*Rh.* 1404a14–15) that Thrasymachus addressed *hypókrisis* in his *Emotional Appeals*. See also Porter (2009: 97–98) and Solmsen (1941: 189).
- 13 Aristotle's translations taken from Kennedy (1991).
- 14 Regarding the position of the constituents of *hypókrisis* in Aristotle's philosophical system, see Calboli (1998: 50–51); Fortenbaugh (1986: 243–246); Katsourēs (1989³: 14); Lossau (1971).
- 15 On the relationship between *hypókrisis* and *lexis*, see Andersen (2003: 25–28); Fortenbaugh (1985: 275–277); González (2015: 521–644). On Aristotle's emphasis on the voice, see Bers (2009: 57–58) and Porter (2009).
- 16 In this sense, González (2015: 8) argues that some scholars have underlined “the consequence of a late convergence between the three domains of epic, dramatic, and rhetorical performance, driven primarily by the Athenians' love for tragedy and comedy and by the importance of self-characterization for the speaker who hoped to convince his audience. The result of this convergence would have been a corruption of the political arena by the theater”. See also Andersen (2003: 20–21) and Lossau (1971).

- 17 Sonkowski (1959: 260–267). Plato’s influence on Aristotle’s treatment of delivery is also dealt with by Fortenbaugh (1986: 246–253).
- 18 Stroup (2006: 24–28); Zucchelli (1962: 63).
- 19 In his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laertius attributes a *Περὶ ὑποκρίσεως* to Theophrastus (5.48). See also Kennedy (1994: 86–87); Porter (2009: 100). Sifakis (2002: 161 n. 34) thinks that Theophrastus’ treatise “was a study of oratorical delivery rather than dramatic acting”.
- 20 On the degree of its impact in Antiquity and its dependence on Aristotle’s theories, see Fortenbaugh (1985).
- 21 On the influence of the Peripatetic approach to rhetoric on Cicero, see Solmsen (1941: 188–189).
- 22 Translation taken from Douglas Olson (2006).
- 23 Athanasius, *Prefatory Remarks to Hermogenes’ On Issues*. Translation taken from Fortenbaugh et al. (1992: 559).
- 24 O’Sullivan (2005).
- 25 Translation by Stork; van Ophuijsen and Dorandi (2000).
- 26 Walker (2000: 89–90).
- 27 A *status quaestionis* on the topic in Chiron (1993: xiii–xl).
- 28 Translation taken from Rhys (1902). As is often the case with this term, *hypókrisis* applies not only to the rhetorical arena but also to the art of acting (*Eloc.* 193–195).
- 29 Tsouna-McKirahan (2007: 91–142). See also Winter (2004: 324–325).
- 30 Translation taken from Hubbell (1920). Winter (2004: 323 n. 1) warns about some unreliable aspects of Hubbell’s translation.
- 31 On Philodemus’ consideration of different types of rhetoric and their relation to the term “*techne*”, see Blank (1995). A similar denunciation can be found in the first lines of Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *The Ancient Orators* 1: “In the epoch preceding our own, the old philosophic Rhetoric was so grossly abused and maltreated that it fell into a decline... . Another Rhetoric stole in and took its place, intolerably shameless and histrionic, ill-bred and without a vestige either of philosophy or of any other aspect of liberal education”. Dionysius’ translations taken from Usher (1974–1985). On this topic, see Winter (2004: 323–333, and especially 322): “[*Hypókrisis*] had become the master and not the servant of rhetoric”.
- 32 For Philodemus advocating for a type of *hypókrisis* that could suit philosophers’ needs, see Winter (2004: 329–330) and Zucchelli (1962: 68–69).
- 33 On the problem of its authorship, see Pérez Castro (1999).
- 34 *Rhetorica ad Herennium*’s translations taken from Caplan (1954). Hall (2007: 221, 225) presents two graphic diagrams of the quality of voice and body movements according to the *Rhetorica*.
- 35 Fantam (2000: 202): “The stress placed by Cicero on skill in performance ... is something unparalleled in the Greek rhetorical tradition before Demosthenes”. Quintilian (XI.3.143) informs us that Plotius Gallus and P. Nigidius Figulus wrote on oratorical gestures.
- 36 Translation taken from Hubbell (1949).

- 37 Translation taken from Rackham (1942).
- 38 Fantham (2004: 293–294). According to Plutarch, a similar interest can be detected in the Stoic Chrysippus (*On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, 1047a-b): “I think that attention must be given not only to unconstrained and smooth order <but> also besides the speech even to the kinds of delivery suitable according to the appropriate modulations of the voice and expressions or gestures of the countenance and hands”. Translation taken from Cherniss (1976).
- 39 See, for instance, *De Or.* I.18, 156; II.72–73; III.41–42, 213, 222–223.
- 40 Translation taken from Sutton and Rackham (1948). The same tone can be perceived in *Orator* 52–60. For Cicero’s definition of orators, see *De Or.* I.64–65. On what was requested from them, *De Or.* I.113–117. For his understanding of *actio* as a *officium* shared by actors and speakers, see Dugan (2005: 137–143) and Pernot (2006b: 14–18).
- 41 This should be read with his caveats on becoming dependent on voice and gesture in mind, *De Or.* I.251–252.
- 42 On this topic, see Bettini (2011: 143–147).
- 43 Fantham (1988).
- 44 See, for instance, 34–35 on how to synchronize the rhythm of a sentence to the breath; 290 on the emotions that an orator should be able to arouse. 202, 221 and 233 exemplify how not especially gifted orators made up for their deficiencies by adapting them to different delivery styles.
- 45 Translation taken from Hendrickson and Hubbell (1962). On descriptions of use of the hands in his works, see Hall (2004: 144–147).
- 46 It is necessary to bear in mind that for Cicero the ideal orator had to combine natural talent, learning of theory and practice (e.g., *Inv.* 5). See also Wisse (2002).
- 47 For his prose style, see Berry and Heath (1997: 396–398). Krostenko (2001: 154–232) covers a wide range of topics combining a sociological and linguistic analysis of Cicero’s rhetorical works. On Cicero’s allusions to clothing, see Dyck (2001: 123–125).
- 48 A minute bibliographical survey of the literature on this aspect of Cicero’s works can be found in Craig (2002: 523–526). In the same spirit, Calboli (1994, especially 81–83 for the study of *actio*) surveys modern studies on Cicero’s reception of Aristotle’s precepts on the five canons of rhetoric.
- 49 Connolly (2007); David (1983b); Hall (2004).
- 50 Johansson (2006: 14) points out his influence in the late antique rhetorical milieu.
- 51 See Artés Hernández (2013: 380–382) and López Rodríguez (2004).
- 52 On the nature, purpose and underlying issues of the last chapters of this work, see Wyk Cronjé (1986: 36–51).
- 53 Translation from Fyfe and Russell (1995). This work was credited to a certain Longinus from the first or the third century AD. On the ongoing discussion of this topic, see Russell (1964: xxii–xxx).
- 54 See, for instance, the laments of Juvenal (VII.150–214) or Tacitus (*Dial.* 28–35) on the state of oratory in early Imperial times. Van den Berg (2014: 246), however, prevents us from radical interpretations of contemporary sources.

- 55 Lopetegui; Muñoz and Redondo (2009: 24–25): “la *dispositio*, la *memoria* y la *actio* quedan claramente regladas y apenas se tratan, si bien en algún caso merecen, excepcionalmente, un lugar más destacado y evidencian la utilización del arte retórica en nuevos contextos socio-culturales”. On the inclusion of delivery when dealing with the rest of the parts of a speech, see Heath (2009: 71). See also Pernot (1993: 339–367).
- 56 In a similar vein, see Quintilian’s *Inst.* XI.3.6.
- 57 Quintilian encouraged speakers to be equipped with oratorical techniques in order to refute those who thought that (XI.3.11) “to be born is enough to make a man an orator”. On this issue, see Winterbottom (1964). Brinton (1983) traces this argument back to Plato. See Vallozza (2000) for Quintilian’s sources in this book of his *Institutio Oratoria*.
- 58 For Quintilian’s construction of the orator’s body as the receptacle of extra-verbal signs that had to be decoded by the audience, see Gunderson (1998: 174–189).
- 59 See, for instance, his comments on emotions (I.8.25) and on the effeminate style of contemporary declamations (V.12.17–23; VIII.3.51). Enders (1997) opened an interesting debate on empowering or disempowering rhetoric depending on the effeminate style adopted by a speaker. On rhetoric and theatricality, see Aldrete (1999: 67–73).
- 60 For a detailed outline of the contents of book eleven, see Díez Coronado (2003: 61–64); Fantham (1982: 249–250); Graf (1991); Katsourēs (1989³: 62–64); Russell (2001: 6–7); Shi (2008: 138–142); Vallozza (2000: 222–223).
- 61 Gunderson (2000: 80): “deviations from this line can dispel the efficacy of the stage presence of the orator as *vir bonus*”.
- 62 Gunderson (2000: 87).
- 63 On the treatment of delivery in Latin treatises, see Olbritch (1997).
- 64 Corbeill (2004: 107–108); Enders (1997: 267).
- 65 On the possible divergences of late antique Latin authors from Cicero’s and Quintilian’s theories, see Leff (1982). Hall (2004: 148) comments on the differences between Cicero’s and Quintilian’s precepts.
- 66 Leff (1982: 75).
- 67 Humfress (2007); Lopetegui; Muñoz and Redondo (2009: 23–27). See also Clarke and Berry (1996: 139–147).
- 68 Patillon (2004: 96–99).
- 69 Translation taken from Fyfe and Russell (1995).
- 70 On the date and composition of this textbook, see Parker Middleton (2005: 25–27). Dilts and Kennedy (1997: ix–x) provide a nuanced interpretation of the real influence of the Aristotelian tradition in this work. Translations of the text taken from Dilts and Kennedy (1997).
- 71 Demetriou (2013: 787). For an interpretation of the illustrations in Terence’s manuscripts in which oratorical gestures are depicted, see Aldrete (1999: 54–67). See also Da Vella (2017).
- 72 On the voice, 97.18: *non solum oratores in pronuntiando laudati, sed etiam actores scaenici, non tamen ita, ut ad scaenicos motus deferaris, sed in quantum sat est ex his ad pronuntiationis ornamenta derives*. On facial gestures, 98.9–11: *Observandum etiam, ut recta sit facies: ne labra detorqueantur, ne immodicus hiatus rictum distendat, ne supinus vultus,*

ne deiecti in terram oculi, ne inclinata cervix, ne elata aut depressa supercilia.

- 73 For the small variations in the consideration of *hypókrisis* and *actio*, see Hall (2004: 143–144). For a case study on the changing perception of an orator’s delivery in Antiquity, see David (1983a). On changes in other theoretical aspects of rhetoric in Imperial and late antique times, see Heath (2002: 423–424).
- 74 Díez Coronado (2003: 87).
- 75 Heath (2002: 419). See, for instance, Phoenix’s proverbial words to Achilles reminding him that he had been sent to teach him (*Il.*, IX. 443) “to be both a speaker of words and a doer of deeds”. On the constitution of rhetorical and oratorical styles after Homeric characters, see Penella (2011).
- 76 *Iliad*’s translations taken from Murray and Wyatt (1999). Kirk (1985–1993: 138) states that Thersites is a speaking name derived from *θέρσος* (“rashness”). On the question of his real social status and familial background, see Marks (2005: 1–6).
- 77 Kirk (1985–1993: 140).
- 78 Bers (2009: 27); Kirk (1985–1993: 142).
- 79 Rankin (1972) traces back the origin of the figure of Thersites to a literary tradition prior to the Homeric poems and studies his integration in the *Iliad*. Rose (1988) surveys the different and kaleidoscopic approaches to Thersites from politics to literature before itemizing the elements that form this episode. Thalmann (1988) studies him as part of the interaction among characters of different social status. Cribiore (2008: 264–265) alludes to the fortune of this character in Imperial and late antique times.
- 80 *νεκείεσκε* (*Il.*, II.221) is the verb used in the poem, a word that will be central to late antique religious disputations (Quiroga 2015). Barker (2009: 55–69) analyzes the episode as an example of to what extent debate and dissension were a habit in the Homeric world.
- 81 Nagy (1979: 263): “the base appearance of Thersites serves to mirror in form the content of his blame poetry”. Also Clinton Simms (2005: 34).
- 82 Postlethwaite (1988: 124–125).
- 83 Translation taken from Vince (1930).
- 84 Bers (2009: 44–68). For the interplay of characteristics of drama and forensic speeches in this period, see Hall (1995).
- 85 Bers (2009: 31, 60–63, 92); Duncan (2006: 58–89). On the argumentation of both orators based on their opponent’s physical appearance, see Shapiro (2011). On the importance of their conflict for late antique invective, see Cribiore (2013: 95–105) and Flower (2013: 47–55).
- 86 Hernandez Muñoz (2006) explores how references to theater and acting were part of Demosthenes’ rhetorical arsenal.
- 87 Demosthenes’ translation taken from Vince and Vince (1939). An interpretation of this passage in Dyck (1985: 43–46) and Serafim (2017: 18, 87–88).
- 88 On the implications of this issue, see Martin (2009: 115–117).
- 89 For Demosthenes’ attacks on Aeschines’ efforts to manipulate audiences by means of his voice, see Easterling (1999).
- 90 On the symbolism of Solon in the fourth century BC, see MacDowell (2000: 309): “Solon had become the principal hero in the story of Athenian democracy, and orators frequently

adduce him in support of their respective arguments”. See also Fredal (2001: 257): “orators drew from the virtuous conduct of past models and current practice (of ‘the people’ or the ‘noble and good’ *kalokagathoi*) because model public actions and manners of self-presentation constituted the performative repertoire out of which citizens styled their own versions of just, virtuous behavior”.

91 Aeschines’ translations taken from Adams (1919).

92 On this charge, see Hesk (1999: 210–211).

93 For a detailed study of the influence of Demosthenes in Antiquity and in Western culture, see Pernot (2006a). Also Duncan (2006: 84–89) and Fredal (2001: 258–259). In the case of Aeschines, Kindstrand (1982) is a brief yet thorough work on the evaluation of Aeschines’ style from his own times until the Second Sophistic movement.

94 On the origin and reception of this anecdote, see Pernot (2016).

95 For a similar appraisal, see Suetonius’ *Life of Caesar* 55.

96 See, for instance, Aelius Aristides’ *To Plato In Defense of Oratory*, or Dio Chrysostom’s orations 32 (“To the people of Alexandria”) and 72 (“On personal appearance”).

97 See Gleason (2009) and Mattern (2008: 69–97).

98 Bibliography on this topic is countless, but in my opinion the most thorough study of the deuterosophistic literature is still Pernot (1993). Whitmarsh (2005) is also an important reference for the study of the Second Sophistic.

99 Henderson (2011: 28–29). See also Fuentes González (2005).

100 Translation taken from Berh (1981–1986). For Aristides’ relationship with dreams, see Connolly (2001: 80–81) and Miletto (2017: 8–14).

101 Kemezis (2011) offers a synoptic description of the cultural world presented by Philostratus in his *Lives of the Sophists*. Also see De Martino (2006) for a descriptive list of the verbal and non-verbal elements involved in the deliveries described by Philostratus.

102 Translation taken from Cave Wright (1921). On the role of emperors in Philostratus’ *Life of the Sophists*, see Anderson (1986: 50–52). On the attention-seeking attitude of some sophists in this work, see Sidebottom (2009: 80–82).

103 A similar story can be found in Lucian’s *Pseudologista* 5–7.

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2 Charlatans, philosophers and Philostratean bishops in late antique literature

In the previous chapter I surveyed the theoretical framework of *hypókrisis* and *actio/pronuntiatio* and offered several references to narrations of rhetorical performances which are useful to the analysis of the cultural habits of their time or to fathoming the author's agenda. In Late Antiquity, both the instructions of rhetoricians and the implications of this type of narrative retained their predominance in cultural and social debates. A case in point is, for instance, Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae*, a monumental work which provides us with vital information about the fourth century AD, even though it is only partially preserved. Among the plethora of topics addressed by Ammianus, his *Res Gestae* contains several accounts of rhetorical performances relating to the politics and the destiny of the Roman Empire, which played an important part in the development of his historiographical program.¹ This is the case of the historian's narration of the public speech delivered by Procopius, a usurper in the early stages of the reign of the emperors Valentinian and Valens. Ammianus begins his account by describing Procopius' first symptoms of stage fright (26.6.18):

all were filled with amazement, fearing the gloomy silence, and believing (as indeed he [Procopius] had expected) that [he] had merely come to a steeper road to death, since a trembling which pervaded all his limbs hindered his speaking, he stood for a long time without a word.

After having built up the anticipation, Ammianus reveals that Procopius did not fully meet the expectations that his public speech had created because of an inconsistent and dubitative performance that was close to being a complete fiasco:

Finally, he began with broken and dying utterance to say a little, justifying his action by his relationship with the Imperial family; then at first by the low whispers of a few, who had been hired for the purpose, later by the tumultuous acclamations of the people, he was

Isabel Moreno has pointed out that Ammianus' attention to the performative dimension of Procopius' disappointing speech was part of the historian's literary strategy to construct the figure of Procopius as a usurper and to depict his coup as amateurish. His lack of eloquence, the stage fright that he seemed to have suffered and the theatrical atmosphere of his delivery made him a poor and almost pitiable figure when contrasted to the impressive oratorical prowess of other emperors featured in Ammianus' *Res Gestae* – especially if we compare it with the public addresses of the emperor Julian (the embodiment of royal virtues in the eyes of Ammianus) once he had become emperor.²

In the next book of the *Res Gestae* we find another reference to a rather peculiar rhetorical performance in which the oratorical elements aimed at turning our attention to an issue are alien to the performative arena (27.3.1–2):

in the town of Pistoria, at about the third hour of the day, in the sight of many persons, an ass mounted the tribunal and was heard to bray persistently, to the amazement both of all who were present and of those who heard of it from the reports of others; and no one could guess what was to come, until later the portended event came to pass. For one Terentius, born in that city, a fellow of low origin and a baker by trade, by way of reward because he had brought Orfitus, an ex-prefect, into court on the charge of embezzlement, held the position of governor in that province.

In this case, as commentators on Ammianus have suggested, the historian was expressing his aversion to social climbers and parvenus by ridiculing the social advancement of Terentius with an omen in the shape of a bizarre oratorical performance.³ These scenes from Ammianus' works reveal that the recording of rhetorical performances provided a venue through which concerns unrelated to rhetoric and oratory could be expressed. In fact, the relevance of rhetoric in Late Antiquity has become the point of departure for most of the studies that have attempted to analyze the *Zeitgeist* of a period when opportunities for public and private speaking abounded and skills in oratorical performance were meant to be displayed. If we bear in mind the speaking occasions dealt with by Menander Rhetor in his rhetorical treatises and add to them other frequent circumstances (e.g., homilies, rhetorical *agones*, public celebrations, forensic speeches, etc.), it will be easy to understand why modern scholarship has depicted Late Antiquity as a world "full of talk".⁴

Much of this talk was carried out by late antique cultural elites who had been educated in Classical *paideia*. Thanks to this grounding they developed the technical skills necessary to represent a city, a community or even themselves in front of governors and emperors. *Pepaideumenoi* has been used by modern scholarship as an umbrella term capable of integrating the different

backgrounds of these elites, but a sense of unease among them can be easily detected in their writings as they wanted to clearly state which specific branch of knowledge had formed them. In this context, the construction and projection of their public personae depended on their understanding of the limits and scope of the Classical *paideia* and, more specifically, of rhetoric. Thus, fourth-century AD sophists' representation of rhetoric was conceptualized in different ways. Libanius considered it to be his bride (*Or.* 1.54). Himerius, a sophist contemporary of Libanius whose fragmentary work also offers important information on the world of late antique education, includes in his orations references to Sirens (*Or.* 38.10; 39.15; 62.1), Muses (*Or.* 35; 64.3–5), swans (*Or.* 40.1) and cicadas (*Or.* 45.1) as sonorous metaphors of the art of eloquence. Christian figures in charge of flocks or arguing on theological matters also considered rhetoric to be a useful instrument that needed to be stripped of the sophistic garments that were usually attached to it. Philosophers, in turn, saw rhetoric as a helpful discipline yet subordinate to the all-encompassing dimension of philosophy. In a beautiful metaphor, the philosopher and bishop Synesius of Cyrene argued for the union of all disciplines – but under the aegis of philosophy (*Dio* 4):

Are not the Muses all together, as their names indicate, whether it be that the gods so named them, or that men employ a term divine? At all events they make up a company by reason, I presume, of this very union. No one of them is ever separated from another, nor in a banquet of the gods does she display her own work, neither does she get an altar or a shrine amongst men... . But philosophy dominates them all. And this is what is doubtless set forth by the immediate presence of Apollo in the harmony of the Muses.⁵

In all these cases, rhetoric was understood as a psychagogic tool to which cultural and religious elites had to devote time and effort in order to help their community.

Regardless of the position of rhetoric and oratory in the system of *pepaideumenoí*, rhetorical performances were arguably one of the most notable occasions at which these *pepaideumenoí* had the chance to showcase their Classical *paideia* and to advance their agendas. Impossible as it is to reconstruct the actual content and real conditions under which these oratorical pieces were delivered, the narrations of these rhetorical performances can be explored as a hermeneutic category that can allow us to grasp some of the pressing issues of the late antique cultural landscape. Among the topics that these accounts addressed, in this chapter I survey texts in which reports of rhetorical performances are used as multilayered narratives to which intellectual and religious figures resorted in order to outline the dynamics of the competitive cultural and religious scene. The delimitation of the mission and public image of late antique philosophers as well as the place of oratory in

Christian rhetoric were topics that were debated through the narration of rhetorical performances.

Philosophers, belletrists and charlatans

“For human beings are not content to admire one man only, but so prone are they to envy, so completely its slave, that when a man excels and towers above the rest they set up another as his rival”. Eunapius’ gnomic comment a propos of the life of the sophist Epiphanius of Syria (VS 493) speaks volumes about the extent to which the ideal of competition had become an ingrained constituent in all fields of culture. Very frequently, this competitive spirit was assessed in rhetorical performances and oratorical *agones* that tested the breadth of the *pepaideumenoí*’s oratorical dexterity and, therefore, their chances of success in the highly contentious cultural milieu of Late Antiquity. But when it came to philosophers’ testimonies on rhetorical performances, the intimations of their views surpassed the consideration of rhetorical performances as oratorical battles of egos or tests of their knowledge of Classical *paideia*, since identity issues also came into play.⁶ As has been consistently argued, the boundaries between the public status of sophists and philosophers had grown blurrier in Late Antiquity.⁷ This was an unremitting concern among fourth-century philosophers that helps to explain the stress of late antique texts on the nature and function of the philosophers’ public performances as distinct from those of the sophists’ – as “sophist” was a term that still in late antique times preserved its Platonic negative connotations even though it designated an official position in the Imperial administration.⁸

This is not to say that philosophers distrusted rhetorical performances *in toto*. Their intention was to make use of them as opportunities to engage wide audiences with their programs without assuming the purposeless theatricalities of contemporary orators.⁹ The Neoplatonic philosopher Isidore of Alexandria was an illustrious representative of this sense of moderation. In Damascius’ *Life of Isidore*, the philosopher is described as actively engaged in judging oratorical duels while also representing the epitome of equanimity (106):

In rhetorical shows at the theatre he (Isidore) praised the performers sparingly and in quiet tones, but pertinently and sensibly; and virtually the whole theatre used his judgments as a yardstick by which to measure the merits or the faults of the orators.¹⁰

Such oratorical merits and faults were precisely a matter of concern for late antique philosophers for whom public speaking occasions at which multitudes were gathered could not be wasted by an inappropriate or poor usage of performative skills. This issue is addressed in a passage of the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*.¹¹ In the context of an argumentation in

defense of the stylistic benefits deriving from dialogue as a literary genre, the author of this work instructs us on the intention of Plato when composing a dialogue (15.36–50):

his object is to make us pay attention to the contents by the very variety of the speakers; otherwise, if it is always one and the same person teaching us, we might, so to speak, doze off and the same thing might happen that happened during an address of the orator Aeschines because in his case it was one and the same person who spoke from the beginning to the end. Standing on the platform and making his speech he failed to keep his audience awake because there was no discussion, no asking and answering of questions, and the jury fell asleep; when the orator saw this he said to them: ‘I hope you had sweet dreams about the trial’. In a conversation, however, people are kept awake by asking and being asked”¹²

This example, which echoes Aeschines’ own complaints on Athenian judicial procedures (*Or.* 3.192), shows how the failure of a renowned speaker some eight hundred years ago was still an active warning of how not to deliver a piece if a positive and active response from the audience was expected. That Neoplatonic philosophers like Proclus (*In Alc.* 170.5–11) and Olympiodorus (*In Alc.* 57.2; 108.10–12) also resorted to this episode corroborates this impression that the fear of boring audiences by an unsuccessful delivery remained an ongoing concern in the late antique philosophical milieu.

The preoccupation with finding a suitable style and place for philosophy in the oratorical scene of Late Antiquity is prominent in the works of the philosopher Themistius. His program did not hesitate to proclaim philosophy as the aegis of the Classical *paideia*, with rhetoric in the role of a propaedeutic discipline. The articulation of the latter into the former would thus constitute a useful cultural and political tool for the philosophers’ engagement in city affairs, which was the gist of his philosophy. Throughout his work, Themistius contrasted his public ethos and agenda with that of other cultural figures whose public appearances he deemed to be empty oratorical performances designed to provide audiences with degrading pastimes. In this manner, Themistius’ numerous claims of cultivating the right type of philosophy appropriate for the profits derived from the Classical *paideia* were intended to distance himself from the image of speakers whose performances were only meant to entertain, thus neglecting the fruitful content that a public delivery should contain. Unlike the orators and sophists that cultivated this defective type of eloquence, Themistius prided himself on being an unflattering speaker in the proemium to his first speech to the emperor Constantius II (*Or.* 1.1a):

Now, for the first time, your majesty, there comes on the scene for you both an independent speech and a truthful praise-giver, and there is no word, however insignificant, that he would utter of his own free will for which he shall not render account to philosophy.¹³

Themistius' main objections to the inappropriate use of oratorical shows are summarized in his account of what, as far as he was concerned, a flamboyant and fruitless rhetorical delivery consisted of. In his *Disquisition on Speaking*, an oration that has not come down to us complete, the philosopher gave vent to his distrust of contemporary rhetors because they (*Or.* 28.341):

are vain, showy and boastful about this learning of theirs. They often bring their eloquence to the theatres and festive assemblies, where it is arrayed in gold and purple, reeking of perfume, painted and smeared with cosmetics, and crowned with garlands of flowers. In addition to being so splendidly and lavishly adorned themselves, what they say is designed to be ingratiating. They are exceedingly courteous and gracious. They honor, extol, and salute those who gaze upon them. They emit a whole range of sounds and, like Sirens, sing songs full of pleasure. And since they are so courteous and agreeable to their audiences, their audiences salute and praise them in turn, and consequently the earth and the sea are teeming with these men.¹⁴

Obviously, Themistius composed his Oration 28 to mock and criticize those who failed to comply with his cultural agenda, one in which rhetoric and oratory were thought of as linguistic tools destined to disseminate the type of philosophy that he cultivated. In his view, an arena that should be used to teach the Classical *paideia* was being (mis)used by performances that constantly resorted to theatrical effects such as singing voices, perfumes and bizarre outfits. In this context, orators and sophists ran the risk of an inappropriate assimilation to the ethos and manners of actors, which, in turn, could lead to a break in the interaction among cultural elites.¹⁵ There are several elements in Themistius' passage that require closer scrutiny if we are to adequately contextualize his criticism of sophistical rhetorical performances as forming part of the strategic creation of his public persona. First, Themistius' basic premise follows Aristotle's complaint (*Rh.* 1403b) about the preeminence of those speakers who managed to develop a psychagogic oratory that dazzled fourth-century BC audiences when performing in dramatic and poetic contests as well as in the political arena. Similarly, some echoes from Dio Chrysostom, one of the main influences on Themistius, can be heard in Themistius' *Or.* 28, as Dio had warned about the necessity of keeping an eye on the kind of shows that people attended at the theater (*Or.* 32.4), "for the organ of hearing of a people is the theatre, and into your theatre there enters nothing beautiful or honourable, or very rarely".¹⁶

In the second place, the tone of invective in *Or.* 28 represents Themistius' efforts to distance himself from other philosophers and sophists who were more interested in the technical side of rhetorical performances. Themistius seemed to be particularly troubled by the vocal dimension of those deliveries since he complained that the speakers of his time did not declaim but sang their speeches, so he recommended carefully selecting which shows to attend

(Or. 22.265):

You are, after all, eager to listen; you gladly pay attention to every word spoken to you. But those who speak to you employ various modes of discourse. Some of them bring you together to praise you. Others practice their rhetorical skills before you. Others sing and sing again, pouring down upon you their sweet and delicate sounds.¹⁷

As shown in [chapter 1](#), grammarians and rhetorical textbooks persistently dealt with the issue of demarcating the boundaries between delivering a speech and acting. Even among the ostentatious sophists from Philostratus' *Lives of Sophists*, moderation in the use of oratorical effects was advised. A pupil of Isaeus, Dionysius of Miletus, who recommended to his students (VS 522) "that honey should be tasted with the finger-tip and not by the handful", had been previously rebuked by his teacher for indulging in sing-song effects in his deliveries (VS 513). In the previous excerpt, Themistius reprised this concern because adopting a sing-song tone while delivering an oratorical piece implied an inappropriate ethos related to effeminacy and added an extravagant touch to the performance alien to the pedagogical tone with which he wanted to instill his rhetorical performances.¹⁸

Thirdly, Themistius' text pays particular attention to the overuse of the vocal and extra-verbal ploys that some orators used, in order to draw the audience's attention to his belief that unnecessary performative elements should be avoided since they trivialize the (potentially) pedagogic nature of rhetorical performances. This was a topic that had been explored before. An illustrious predecessor in chastising those who chose to follow a superficial type of oratory was Lucian. In his *Professor of Rhetoric*, the short path to becoming an expert orator – in opposition to the long path, which required studying and working hard – involved mastery of the generous deployment of extralinguistic means such as those of the orators that Themistius rebuked in his Or. 28 (Luc., *Rh. Pr.* 11):

Whenever you speak, sprinkle in some of them as a relish. Never mind if the rest is inconsistent with them, unrelated, and discordant. Only let your purple stripe be handsome and bright, even if your cloak is but a blanket of the thickest sort.¹⁹

Themistius' reference to the "purple" eloquence of the orators that he denounced shares these clear negative connotations. Leaving aside the metonymic uses of purple as substitute for "emperor" in other works (Or. 1.13c; 3.45c; 5.64d, 65c, 67d, 71a-b; 6.73d), Themistius' mentions of purple firmly link the appealing appearance of this color to contexts and objects in which it is synonymous with deception (Or. 20.238b; 21.247b, 259c).²⁰

In order to avoid his oratorical performances being mistaken for the type of sophistical displays in which orators craved acclamations and practiced a

deceptive kind of rhetoric, Themistius toiled to design his own public identity by setting strict boundaries even though categories such as “sophist” and “philosopher” were porous in the late antique milieu. As Sidebottom put it, “a man could not claim to be both sophist and philosopher. The symbols of the two were mutually exclusive, being defined in contrast to each other”.²¹ In his attempt to appear estranged from the orators that he depicted singing and smiling in his Oration 28, in the oration *The Sophist* Themistius presents himself as a serious speaker impervious to the public’s reaction who is determined to accomplish his duty without yearning for a positive response (Or. 23.282):

do you think that I still need the applause and cries of approval that you are accustomed to give me so generously every time I speak to you? ... Whenever I come before you, I do so to give you advice or instruction.

Themistius claimed that he did not heed the public’s reaction to his rhetorical abilities but assured his audience that they were well received. This attitude indicates that his denunciation of sophistical rhetorical deliveries was intended to present his credentials as a speaker capable of putting into practice the Ciceronian *docere et delectare*. In his *Exhortation to the Nicomedians*, Themistius includes some hints as to the management of his public persona by likening his public oratory to the unadorned yet morally rewarding words of Socrates in contrast to the charming (and fee-purchased) rhetoric of Gorgias. “Now I hope that you yourselves”, says Themistius completing his comparison (Or. 24.300–301),

do not scorn one who is trying to present you with friendly offerings just because they are not extremely delightful or capable of enchanting your ears... . For this is an important feature of my eloquence: it is free and independent, and, once it takes leave of its father, it is not compelled to stay on one course.

Themistius’ reminder that his advice is free and for all to hear was intended to strengthen his public persona as a selfless philosopher who only wanted to position his understanding of the Classical *paideia* as the model from which society could learn. Such a statement was not gratuitous. His close relationship to the Imperial power (especially to the Christian emperor Constantius II) and the rewards that he had obtained from this activity troubled him as it had given rise to suspicions about the abnegation and altruism of his work. As Watts has commented, “Themistius had grown from a fellow intellectual who enjoyed prominence because of his teaching into a political power-broker”.²² For someone who had proclaimed himself (Or. 16.200c) “the voice of the Senate”, an ongoing construction of the self was needed in order to clear his reputation and situation not only in Constantinople but also in the eastern

Mediterranean, an area in which he had held important influence for decades. It is in this context that his reports of rhetorical performances, delivered by his rivals or by himself, offered Themistius a convenient forum from which he could express his views on a variety of topics. In this sense, Themistius' Oration 28 is a work that functioned as an identity marker in that it served its author to defend his cultural agenda by finding faults with the type of rhetorical performances that pandered to spectators of late antique oratory. While some orators focused on mesmerizing audiences with their dazzling performances, Themistius indicates, his status as a philosopher prompted him to talk publicly in order to advise and educate people without resorting to showy or contentious attitudes leading to sophistical positions.²³ Besides, a certain degree of reluctance to engage in oratorical displays had become a mark of distinction for philosophers. The philosopher Chrysantius was, according to Eunapius of Sardes, as eloquent and enchanting as Orpheus. His kind natural disposition made him compliment even rhetorical compositions of a poor quality, but (VS 502),

it was not easy to rouse him to philosophical discussions or competitions, because he perceived that it is especially in such contests that men become embittered. Nor would anyone readily have heard him showing off his own erudition or found him inflated because of it, or insolent and arrogant towards others.²⁴

Rhetoric and oratory were also exploited by Themistius in his considerations of the state of philosophy in his time. In Late Antiquity, the ideal of the union of all the different branches of philosophy sharing a common purpose was hinted at in different sources. In his invective against the contemporary Cynics, the emperor Julian acknowledged the aspiration to reach this ideal when he stated that (*Or.* 6.186a-b), "philosophy is one, and that, to speak generally, all philosophers have a single aim though they arrive at that aim by different roads".²⁵ An idealized image of philosophy as a discipline in which different yet harmonized opinions converged is put in the mouth of the emperor Constantine in a letter transmitted by the Church historian Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* I.7):

In order to remind you of your duty by an example of an inferior kind, I may say: you are well aware that even the philosophers themselves are united under one sect. Yet they often differ from each other on some parts of their theories: but although they may differ on the very highest branches of science, in order to maintain the unity of their body, they still agree to coalesce.²⁶

However, this romanticized stance on the unity of the different branches of late antique philosophy vanishes in Themistius' works as he condemns contemporary philosophers who did not want to engage in public speaking occasions. We find a programmatic passage in his speech *On Speaking* (*Or.*

if a person buries his oration away in obscurity and locks them up, as if they were bastards begotten in adultery, and does not bring this fine progeny of his out to bestow upon the community, how could he be more ill-disposed towards his city and more deserving of public condemnation?²⁷

Again in his oration 28, he chastised those Neoplatonists who (*Or.* 28.341d-342d),

are fearful (I know not why) and wary of public assemblies ... and they cannot bear to look away from their couches and secluded corners. They have completely forgotten that their forebears used to speak to crowds of people in workshops, porticoes, baths, and theatres.

This line of argumentation was not new. Dio Chrysostom had previously attacked socially and oratorically inactive philosophers that (*Or.* 32.8), “do not appear in public at all and prefer not to make the venture, possibly because they despair of being able to improve the masses”. However, Themistius’ criticism of Neoplatonic philosophers came back to haunt him. The Neoplatonic Damascius censured philosophers who were disengaged from political life while, at the same time, replying to Themistius’ attack on the Neoplatonists by quoting his own words from Oration 28 (*Live of Isidore*, 124): “That is why the learned, *who sit in their corner and philosophise* at length and in a grand manner about justice and moderation, utterly disgrace themselves if they are compelled to take some action”.²⁸

Themistius was not alone in voicing distress at the unsuitable integration into and inappropriate role of rhetoric and oratory in a philosophical program. The Neoplatonic Synesius, who later became bishop of Ptolemais, confronted those who questioned his philosophical credentials throughout his life. Equipped with rhetorical skills and educated in philosophy in the school of Hypatia, Synesius strove to make clear that his rhetorical prowess was at the service of a life guided by philosophical principles engaged in public affairs. In a letter sent to a certain Nicander together with a copy of his *Eulogy of Baldness*, Synesius acknowledged his debt to his instruction in the main disciplines of the Classical *paideia* (*Ep.* 1.1):

I have begotten children in my books, some from most august Philosophy, and from Poesy who dwelleth with her in the Temple, some again from Rhetoric of the public place. But anyone can see that they are all from the same father, who inclines now to the serious and now to the lighter side.²⁹

The place of honor, however, was reserved for philosophy, as has been shown at the beginning of this chapter in a passage from Synesius’ *Dio* in which he advocated for the union of all branches of knowledge under the dominance of

philosophy (4: ἀλλὰ φιλοσοφία τὸ ἐπὶ πάσαις ἐστί).

The preeminent role of philosophy in his concept of culture seems to have been contested. Synesius felt exasperated by short-sighted contemporaries for whom rhetoric and philosophy were almost incompatible. His efforts to justify his style and cultural program account for the apologetically aggressive tone that he adopted when he tried to refute Christian monks and *pepaideumenoι* who had discredited him for his view on the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. In the epistle 154 addressed to his teacher Hypatia, Synesius laments that (*Ep.* 154.2),

some of those who wear the white or dark mantle have maintained that I am faithless to philosophy, apparently because I profess grace and harmony of style and because I venture to say something concerning Homer and concerning the figures of the rhetoricians. In the eyes of such persons one must hate literature (μισόλογον) in order to be a philosopher, and must occupy oneself with divine matters only.³⁰

Among his intellectual enemies, Synesius continues, some (*Ep.* 154.4),

are the readiest of all to spin out discussions concerning God. Whenever you meet them, you have to listen to their babble about inconclusive syllogisms. They pour a torrent of phrases over those who stand in no need of them, in which I suppose they find their own profit.

Synesius describes part of his critics as (*Ep.* 154.5),

sophists, much more unfortunate than these. They would like to be famous in the same way, but unfortunately for them they are incapable even of this... . A shadow would surpass these men in uttering anything to the point; but their pretensions are extraordinary. Oh, what proudly arched brows! They support their beards with the hand. They assume a more solemn countenance than the statues of Xenocrates.³¹

These last lines reflect that Synesius thought that the cultural and social conventions of his time had been invaded by dilettantes keen on theatrical gestures and affectation, both of which had become keys to success and social recognition.

In another burlesque vignette Synesius describes a scene in which two poseurs in a lecture-room engaged in trivial disputations about overplayed topics regarding what we would nowadays call “sophistopolis” (*On Dreams* 13.3):

the two sat there with all the high seriousness of philosophy, and each tugged at his beard, that as far as one could guess weighed a talent. All this dignity did not prevent them from indulging in abuse and anger, or from tossing their hands about wildly, the while they delivered interminable speeches on behalf of men, their intimate friends, they had not even any existence in nature.

They were so obsessed with the agonistic element of their performance that in the end (13.3–4), “they have made the training a contest (μελέτην ἀγῶνα πεποιήνται)”. This passage is revealing of Synesius’ critique of the *ars gratia artis* nature of this type of public oratorical duels: dealing with scholastic topics eventually became a theatrical show delivered by two charlatans completely alien to the ethos of orators as understood by Cicero or Quintilian.

Synesius put more emphasis on the purposelessness of contemporary oratory in a long section of his *Dio*, in which the philosopher mockingly portrays sophists as slaves of their mercurial audiences by narrating an unsuccessful rhetorical performance.³² First Synesius makes sure to emphasize the anxieties and efforts that a sophist had to go through when preparing and delivering a speech in order to please audiences (12.34–41):

he has endured many nights without sleep, and has been on the strain many days, and has come near to distilling away his soul by hunger and anxieties, that he may compile something good ... he has also bathed himself before the appointment and has gone to meet it with brilliant dress and appearance in order that he too may be a noble spectacle.³³

Then, Synesius continues, the sophist tries to control his nerves by smiling in order to keep his composure on stage (12.41–43). At this point of his performance the sophist’s worries turn to his voice. After having chewed gum³⁴ to speak more clearly (12.46–49),

right in the midst of the declamation he turns and asks for his flask, which the attendant, who has long had it ready, hands over to him. Then he swallows and gargles some of it, that he may put a youthful note to his melodies.³⁵

Unfortunately for the sophist, the factors that might cause an oratorical performance to go wrong were legion and beyond his expertise in performative skills. On this occasion, it just so happened that the whimsical audience disliked him so much that they would (12.49–53),

like him to sing himself out, for then they would have their laugh. Again, they would like him merely to open his mouth and gape with uplifted hand like a statue, and then become more voiceless than a statue, for thus they could leave, as they had long desired.

Consonant with the emphasis on the vocal aspect of a rhetorical performance given by rhetoricians and textbooks, Synesius epitomizes the audience’s disapproval of the sophist’s performance by using the infinitive form of the verb ἐξῆδω (“sing himself out” in Fitzgerald’s translation), a term that was used by Plato to refer to the swan song (*Phd.* 85a).³⁶

As Themistius had done before, Synesius used some of his works to extol and congratulate himself on the freedom of his philosophical position. Unlike the overanxious sophists who yearned for people’s attention, he proudly

confessed that (*Dio*, 12),

I converse with as many as I please, on as many topics as I please; I choose the topics, the times, the places, and the manner. My interlocutor confers a benefit but he also receives it; for my part I should prefer to listen to those who have anything worth saying than to talk myself.

Synesius' words should not be read as just a self-interested declaration of a man of letters who boasted of being independent but also as a way to voice his anxiety over the harsh scrutiny applied to oratorical performances by audiences and peers. He was not alone in doing this. In his moral treatise *On Slavery*, the sophist Libanius also considered being a sophist a career that demanded such sacrifices and servitude to his audiences that it was comparable to suffering Sisyphus' punishment (*Or.* 25.46). Since the duties of sophists fell into different milieus, a sophist needed to be solicitous about and compliant to fellow teachers, pedagogues, students, their families and any person involved in the educational process. Furthermore, the sophist was held accountable if the student failed to improve, an undesirable situation that would bring a bad reputation to his school (*Or.* 25.47–48).³⁷ Governors and counselors also exercised an important pressure over sophists for they wanted their actions to be praised (*Or.* 25.49). With a tone similar to Synesius' description of the sophist's failed performance, Libanius states that it was when it came to the moment of the delivery of a speech that the sophist felt a slave more than ever since the volume of the popular acclamation (βοή is the word used by Libanius), and not the merit of his rhetorical abilities, would determine whether his performance was a success or a failure (*Or.* 25.50).

Philostratean bishops

Late antique bishops also resorted to critiques of sophistic performances in their efforts to control both public discourse and the making of religious orthodoxy. This attitude was especially accentuated from the reign of the emperor Constantine (306–337), a period characterized by the implementation of legal and financial measures conducive to the social advancement of the Church with the bishops as its spearhead.³⁸ In fact, in the copies of Constantine's letters transmitted by the Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea, the bishops were already addressed as high-ranking officials. This situation precipitated important changes in the course of less than a century. Bowersock has pointed out,

In 325 it was the emperor who ordered the bishops to assemble at Nicaea, but in 390 it was a defiant bishop [i.e., Ambrose of Milan] who was able to order the emperor to abase himself in public and alter his conduct.³⁹

A number of dispositions in the *Codex Theodosianus* bear testimony to this process in the change of the bishops' social profile. They were bestowed with such legal authority that eventually the scope of the *audientia episcopalis* had to be limited; they were also granted financial and legal immunity, were in charge of the distribution of food and donations, and became close collaborators of the emperor.⁴⁰ In short, the figure of the bishop became a constant and ubiquitous presence in late antique city life, as Ammianus Marcellinus commented when he meekly complained that (21.16.18) "thronges of bishops hastened hither and thither on the public post-horses to the various synods, as they call them".

Within this new scenario a wide range of duties emerged which were to be performed by bishops. The representation of communities and cities, a role that had traditionally been carried out by sophists and philosophers, gradually became a responsibility that bishops undertook. Their increased leadership roles in several aspects of city life, as well as the curial background of some of them, contributed to their being seen as suitable representatives.⁴¹ Indicative of this change is Libanius' Oration 19, in which the sophist forged a fictional embassy to Constantinople to plead forgiveness before the emperor Theodosius after the violent incidents that took place during the Riot of the Statues in Antioch in 387 AD. The pagan sophist composed this oration with the intention of responding to the success of the actual journey that the bishop Flavian had made to persuade the emperor not to punish the Syrian city.⁴²

Their new status and the growing influence of bishops and Christian elites increased the number of public speaking occasions at which they had to prove their oratorical *savoir faire*, which led to a reconsideration of their approach to rhetoric and oratory.⁴³ The relation between eloquence and theology had in St. Paul its most significant representative. For him, spreading the word

was not to be confused with mere verbosity or empty propaganda. Rather, his rhetoric is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and because of that empowerment it is powerful and achieves the certainty of full conviction necessary for the Christian faith.⁴⁴

The complexity of St. Paul's understanding of how to preach expressed in his letters was based on the assumption that the preacher was a mere medium through which the Word should pass untouched, a notion that was still felt in Late Antiquity.⁴⁵ From a Christian perspective, the priority had to be in the message rather than in the way it was put. As an apocryphal letter of Basil of Caesarea reads, what Christian leaders were to teach was (*Ep.* 339) "in substance true, though in style (ἀξιῖν) unlearned". In this way, important names from fourth-century Christianity like John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus or Gregory of Nyssa found themselves in an awkward position. They had been educated in the Classical *paideia* and in the Scriptures, yet they

were meant to transmit a message accessible to the common people, without surrendering to the demands of a public with a taste for sophisticated shows when they attended sermons, homilies, funeral speeches, orations on the memory of martyrs or the consecration of sacred spaces.⁴⁶

One of the towering figures of late antique Christianity, Gregory of Nazianzus, did not mask his awareness of the problems involved in the instruction of flocks when it came to explaining to them the intricacies of the theological debates of his time.⁴⁷ “How difficult it is to discuss such important questions”, Gregory claims (*Or.* 2.39), “especially before a large audience, composed of every age and condition, and needing like an instrument of many strings, to be played upon in various ways”. What his testimony (and that of other Christian elites) indicated was that Christian orators were having a hard time when preaching to audiences used to oratorical shows. Gregory’s distress is epitomized by his realization that churchgoers did not look for spiritual guidance but for entertaining displays of oratory. “For they seek not for priests, but for orators”, he exclaims in his farewell oration in the Council of Constantinople at 381 (*Or.* 42.24),

not for stewards of souls, but for treasurers of money, not for pure offerers of the sacrifice, but for powerful patrons. I will say a word in their defense: we have thus trained them, by becoming all things to all men, whether to save or destroy all, I know not.⁴⁸

This situation should not be regarded as only a matter of oratorical style as it bore important religious implications. Christian orators had to provide their audiences with spiritual comfort and instruction, but late antique sources preserve numerous reports of speakers concerned only with their performance style. In this way, criticism of the inappropriate use of oratorical ploys, commonly associated with figures that were suspiciously viewed in the Christian imaginary (pagan sophists and philosophers, actors, charlatans) was frequently used to characterize heretics.⁴⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea, for instance, fashioned the portrait of the heretic bishop Paul of Samosata and of his theological rivalries as if it were an oratorical duel against Malchion, who denounced Paul for being a follower of the teachings of the heretic Artemon.⁵⁰ We are told that, despite his humble origins, Paul (*HE*.7.30.7),

now possesses abundant wealth through his iniquities and sacrilegious acts, and through those things which he extorts from the brethren, depriving the injured of their rights and promising to assist them for reward, yet deceiving them.

Eusebius continues his invective against Paul by stating that the heretic (*HE*. 7.30.8–9),

assumes worldly dignities, preferring to be called *ducenarius* rather than bishop; and struts in the market-places, reading letters and reciting them as he walks in public, attended by a

bodyguard, with a multitude preceding and following him.

According to the historian, Paul's moral blemishes reached their climax at his public appearances, where he (*HE* 7.30.9):

contrives to glorify himself, and deceive with appearances, and astonish the minds of the simple, preparing for himself a tribunal and lofty throne, – not like a disciple of Christ ... he rebukes and insults those who do not applaud, and shake their handkerchiefs as in the theatres, and shout and leap about like the men and women that are stationed around him, and hear him in this unbecoming manner, but who listen reverently and orderly as in the house of God – or in that he violently and coarsely assails in public the expounders of the Word that have departed this life, and magnifies himself, not as a bishop, but as a sophist and juggler.⁵¹

Eusebius' portrayal aims to deprive Paul of the dignity of the bishopric and to label him as a heretic by characterizing him as one of those sophists with a penchant for mundane goods that so frequently appeared in Imperial literature. Paul is described as a σοφιστῆς καὶ γόης (*HE* 7.30). The latter is a word with derogatory connotations not uncommonly linked to the world of magic and deceptive rhetoric.⁵² As for the use of σοφιστής, Eusebius is in tune with Themistius and Synesius when he makes use of this word with its Platonic innuendos, a frequent practice in late antique texts. In an apocryphal letter addressed to Libanius, we read that Basil of Caesarea confronted his teacher with a similar critique over the practice of the kind of oratory that sought worldly benefits in opposition to the spiritually rewarding nature of the eloquence represented by the Christian variant.⁵³ Replying to a hair-splitting question on vocabulary posed by Libanius, Basil compares the use of oratory made by sophists and bishops (*Ep.* 348):

the race of sophists, whose art consists in levying a toll upon eloquence. Who of the bishops has made merchandise out of eloquence? Who has made his pupils pay fees? It is you who place eloquence on sale, just as those who make confections of honey peddle their honey-cakes.

Basil, who had reminded Libanius of the Platonic consideration of sophists (*Phaedr.* 267a) in a previous letter, invested the term “sophist” with a vocabulary intimately related to the payment of fees for learning (*Ep.* 348: κερδαίνειν, τελωνεῖν, ἐφοροθέτησε, μισθοφόρους).

Like a morally complacent sophist, in Eusebius' portrayal Paul of Samosata is depicted interacting with the public, an attitude that reminds us of those flattering sophists driven by fame and reputation who were also mocked by Themistius and Synesius for being overanxious for people's approval and acclamation. In this way Eusebius exploited the most distinctive features of the image of a sophist to disparage the heretic Paul by likening him to the persona

of a public performer concerned with the spectacular side of oratory instead of with the proper disclosure of the Scriptures. This type of portrayal, which rested on equating heretical beliefs with sophistical manners, would have a long tradition in Christian historiography. In the *Ecclesiastical History* by Socrates Scholasticus, heresies were habitually professed by Christians willing to win over their flocks by their oratorical charms. The Arian Eunomius' ignorance of the Scriptures was, according to the Church historian (*HE* 4.7), counteracted by his oratorical dexterity and ability to speak in public with a wide vocabulary in different manners:

And as he had but a very slender knowledge of the letter of Scripture, he was wholly unable to enter into the spirit of it. Yet he abounded in words, and was accustomed to repeat the same thoughts in different terms, without ever arriving at a clear explanation of what he had proposed to himself.⁵⁴

Making up for ignorance of the Scriptures with euphonic words is also a charge brought against the heresiarch Nestorius (*HE* 7.29) or Anastasius (*HE* 7.32), both of them known for their melodious voices.

Gregory of Nazianzus also made frequent use of criticism of the oratorical style of his opponents in the context of religious disputations. In the autobiographical lines about his bitter confrontations against his theological rivals, Gregory describes himself as (*Concerning his own life* vv. 697–702) “withered, bent and shabbily dressed,/ ... not possessed of a handsome appearance, a stranger, a vagrant, buried in the darkness of the earth”. Concerning the desperation of his rivals in Constantinople, Gregory tells us in an exercise of ventriloquism that his image as an uncompromising person played to his own advantage when it came to rhetorical performances (vv. 704–718):

This is the kind of thing they could be heard to say: We are flatterers, you are not... . We are slaves to circumstances and to the people's whims,/ always letting our boat run with whatever wind is blowing./ Like the chameleon and the polyp,/ we continually change the colours of our words./ But you, in your stubbornness, are to us an immovable/ anvil... . How is it that you, sir, with your fluent tongue/ attract the people, but take shots of deadly accuracy/ at those who, in their many different errors, hold misguided/ views?⁵⁵

The charge of submission to the whims of the audience (v. 708: δουλεύομεν καιροῖς τε καὶ λαῶν πόθοις) that Synesius and Libanius, as we have seen, elaborated in their works is reinforced here by Gregory with references to the chameleon and the polypus. Comparisons with these two animals implied a changeability of character associated with attention-seeking figures like sophists but which was completely incompatible with the exemplarity demanded from a Christian leader. It is not infrequent to find fickleness and mutability featuring in contemporary portraits of characters with a subservient

mindset. The emperor Julian, for example, accused Octavian of being an unstable emperor (*Caes.* 309a) “changing colour continually, like a chameleon”.⁵⁶ In his evaluation of Libanius’ personality, Eunapius describes the sophist as someone that (*VS* 495) “was so clever in adapting and assimilating himself to all sorts of men that he made the very polypus look foolish”.⁵⁷ Chameleons and polypus were not the only beings to which Gregory associated the ethos of those who professed deceptive and corrupting oratory. One of his theological nemeses, George of Cappadocia, was portrayed as a “monster” (*Or.* 21.16: τέρας), who was spreading his heretical beliefs throughout the Empire. As MacDougall has pointed out in a recent study, Gregory’s lines resorted to the same vocabulary and imaginary as Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his description of Asiatic oratory, thus suggesting “a connection between the allegedly effeminate rhetorical style of the Asianists and the theology, language, and mores of the Arian heretics”.⁵⁸

In this context of tumultuous theological disputations, Gregory set himself up as the paradigm of the Christian orator. For him, the ethos of a Christian orator should be exemplary and spotless, in order to prevent being assimilated to public figures characterized by their ambition for superficialities (*Or.* 42.24):

I did not know that we ought to ride on splendid horses, and drive in magnificent carriages, and be preceded by a procession and surrounded by applause, and have everyone make way for us, as if we were wild beasts, and open out a passage so that our approach might be seen afar.

In a long passage from his *Concerning his own life* (vv. 1190–1259), Gregory provides us with what can be considered an abridged version of a Christian textbook on rhetoric, which deals with style, delivery, invention and the management of emotions. In his eyes, one of the fundamental differences with secular rhetoric is that (*Concerning his own life* vv. 1242–1247) “their [i.e., pagans’] rhetoric aims at display and is full of fictitious arguments which impress young boys... . But as for me, the aim is to speak the truth”.⁵⁹ The ability to speak the truth and, at the same time, persuade were common features of the Christian ideal of the *vir sanctus dicendi peritus*. For Sozomen, a fifth-century Church historian, it was John Chrysostom who embodied this ideal (*HE* VIII.2.4):

he imparted zeal from his own virtues to his hearers. He produced convictions similar to his own, because he did not enforce them by rhetorical art and strength (οὐ τέχνῃ τινὶ καὶ δυνάμει λόγου βιάζεται), but expounded the sacred books with truth and sincerity. For a word which is ornamented by deeds customarily shows itself as worthy of belief; but without these the speaker appears as an impostor and a traitor to his own words, even though he teaches earnestly.⁶⁰

If heretics and unorthodox figures were fashioned as corrupting sophists, it

is only natural that theological and religious disputations were frequently described as oratorical *agones*. This pattern played a pivotal role in Socrates Scholasticus' historiographical plan, one in which he criticized those Christians whose rhetorical deliveries were not performed to help reach religious consensus but to display their oratorical aptitudes in the search for vain contentions – φιλονεικία, a term that loomed large in Socrates' work.⁶¹ An example can be found in his report on the preparatory contests (προαγών) prior to the celebration of the Council of Nicaea in 325. This type of προαγών attracted and amused people for its similarities with a sophistical *agon* (*HE* 1.7). Socrates indicates that the intervention of a layman was needed to remind the dialecticians and the audience that Christ and the apostles promoted "honest and pure judgment" and not the empty pastimes (κενήν ἀπάτην) they were performing in search of oratorical triumphs. A similar criticism of φιλονεικία is revealed in another apocryphal letter of Basil of Caesarea sent to Libanius. In epistle 338, the sophist confesses how happy he was when he received a letter from Basil. Libanius read it out loud to some *pepaideumenoι* that were at that moment with him. The sophist reacted enthusiastically by exclaiming "We have been vanquished!" "And in what have you been vanquished?" they asked; "and why do you not grieve at having been vanquished?" I said: "I have been worsted in beauty of epistolary style. And it is Basil who has gained the upper hand... . Therefore write similar letters, and continue to win victories; for that means my winning them". The vocabulary deployed in the narration of this episode betrays the strong agonistic character of the late antique cultural landscape as indicated by the almost obsessive presence of words deriving from the verb νικάω and the noun νίκη (*Ep.* 338: νενικήμεθα, νενίκησαι νίκην, νενικημένος, τὴν νίκην, νικά, νικᾶν, κεκράτηκε). The fictitious nature of this epistolary exchange should not preclude us from drawing conclusions. On the contrary, it shows that in the time when these epistles were forged performance culture permeated all levels of late antique public life.

The integration of conventions from the secular oratorical world into the late antique Christian milieu was no easy task. Redefining the practice and purpose of rhetorical performances in a new historical scenario entailed the conflation of two different cultural traditions in a process that, at the same time, provoked internal disputes and debates on the making of religious orthodoxy.⁶² Works like Ambrose's *De Officiis* ("On the duties of the clergy") or John Chrysostom's *De Sacerdotio* ("On Priesthood") reflect a preoccupation with counseling on how to attract a flock's attention without resorting to oratorical flaws or sophistical manners. In late antique Christian literature, therefore, accounts of flamboyant rhetorical performances served as a means to put those who deviated from a certain creed under the spotlight by

attributing to them derogative features traditionally assigned to heretics or sophists with a penchant for theatricality.⁶³

Notes

- 1 On the relevance of speech scenes in Ammianus' *Res Gestae*, see O'Brien (2013a and 2013b). Ammianus' translations taken from Rolfe (1940).
- 2 Moreno (2016: 138–139). On the role of this episode in Ammianus' narrative, see Den Boeft et al. (2006: 169–171) and Mleczek (2015: 275–281).
- 3 Den Boeft et al. (2009: 33, 37). On the presence of unqualified social climbers in the oratorical milieu, Eshleman thinks that (2012: 34) "In each community the difficulty of effective gatekeeping fed anxieties that its ranks would be penetrated by unqualified impostors or even deliberate saboteurs, whose presence would corrode its identity".
- 4 Cameron (2014: 23). In a similar vein, see Cribiore (2007: 212–213).
- 5 Translation of Synesius' works taken from Fitzgerald (1930). For a particular approach to Synesius' conception of rhetoric as a discipline subordinate to philosophy, see Quevedo Blanco (2011) and Roques (2006).
- 6 A comprehensive survey of the relationship between rhetoric and late antique philosophy can be found in the contributions of the volume edited by Fowler (2014).
- 7 Goulet (2014: 143–148, especially 162, vol. I): "Manifestement, dans son esprit, philosophie et rhétorique sont difficilement dissociables". See also Momigliano (1987: 175); Watts (2017: 26).
- 8 For a specific example of the implications of the use of these terms in the late antique cultural scene, see Watts (2017: 54–55).
- 9 Here I follow Chaniotis' definition of "theatricality" (1997: 222): "the effort of individuals or groups to construct an image of themselves which is at least in part deceiving, because it either is in contrast to reality or because it exaggerates or partly distorts reality ... furthermore, the effort to gain control over the emotions and the thoughts of others, to provoke specific reactions, such as, sorrow, pity, anger, fear, admiration or respect". On the conscious usage of theatricalized ways in the Second Sophistic as a cultural and political instrument, see Connolly (2001: 91–92).
- 10 Translation from Athanassiadi (1999). Late antique philosophers gifted with rhetorical and oratorical skills were commonplace in the literature of the period, see Damascius' *Life of Isidore* (Severianus, 108; Agapius, 127) or Eunapius' *VS* (500, Chrysantius).
- 11 According to Watts, this type of prolegomena (2017: 162) "helped students to understand the architecture of the philosophical curriculum and how the individual texts within it fit together".
- 12 Translations from Westerink (1962).
- 13 Translation taken from Heather and Moncur (2001). On this passage, see Vanderspoel (1995: 78–79). In *The Heroic Deeds of Constantius* the emperor Julian also elaborated on the topic of the unoriginality of the encomia of other writers in opposition to his honest and heart-felt words in praising the deeds of his cousin (*Or.* 2.78a–80b).
- 14 On the positive and negative symbolism of Sirens in the world of late antique oratory, see Penella (2007: 47, ft. 34); Pizzzone (2006: 32–34). Some of the features described by Themistius'

narration can be found in Philostratus' *VS* 571–572, 623. For a more detailed analysis of this speech, see Quiroga (2013a).

- 15 On *paideia* as moderator in the rules of interaction among *pepaideumenoi*, see Howard (2013: 12) and Hugoniot (2004).
- 16 Translation taken from Cohoom and Lamar Crosby (1940).
- 17 The same concern is expressed at the beginning of his *Or.* 33, where Themistius relates an anecdote on Aristoxenus and musical styles in theatrical shows.
- 18 See, for instance, Quint., *Inst.* V.12.19–20, XI.3.57–59. See also Cribiore (2014: 65) and Raimondi (2012: 386–387).
- 19 Translation taken from Harmon (1925).
- 20 A similar opinion on the use of purple in clothing can be found in Gregory of Nazianzus' *Or.* 4.113. On the social dimension of the use of purple in Late Antiquity, see Reinhold (1970: 62–70). On its significant role as part of the poetics of late antique literature, see Roberts (1989: 115–121).
- 21 Sidebottom (2009: 73).
- 22 Watts (2015: 94).
- 23 As Penella has shown (2014: 147–150), Themistius resorted to Platonic arguments to define what were the spheres of action of a philosopher and a sophist.
- 24 In a similar tone, see Eun. *VS* (481, Priscus).
- 25 Translation from Wright (1913).
- 26 Translation from Zenos (1886).
- 27 Themistius' translations of his private orations are taken from Penella (2000).
- 28 Translation taken from Athanassiadi (1999). On the sentiment of fifth- and sixth-century Neoplatonists toward rhetoric, see Caluori (2014).
- 29 The first line of this epistle echoes Plato's *Phaedrus* 278b ("such words should be considered the speaker's own legitimate offspring"), thus adding an additional philosophical color to his statement
- 30 On the relevance of Homeric quotations in Synesius, see Pizzone (2006).
- 31 As Watts has recently pointed out (2017: 55), Synesius' use of the term "sophist" reprised the derogative connotations that Plato gave it. See also Treu (1958: 101–102). Dio Chrysostom, one of the most important influences on Synesius, dealt with the clichés attached to philosophers in his *Or.* 72, *On Personal Appearance*.
- 32 On the nature and content of this work, see Bregman (1982: 127–137); Cameron and Long (1993: 62–69); Garzya (1972); Giannattasio (1974); Lacombrade (1951: 139–149).
- 33 On these lines, see Treu (1958: 103).
- 34 *τραγακάνθη*, a type of natural gum that was used to treat sore throat and to deal with voice problems (cough, aphony, etc.) according to Dioscorides 3.20.
- 35 On testing the voice before a performance, see also Libanius' *Or.* 1.72.
- 36 For the use of this verb, see Garzya (1989: 698 n. 76) and Treu (1958: 166).
- 37 See also Lib. *Or.* 62.32.

- 38 Gilliard (1984: 155–157). A comprehensive view can be found in Fernández Ubiña (2015). Mayer (2001) has summarized the bishops' competences in the fourth century AD.
- 39 Bowersock (1986: 299).
- 40 Lizzi Testa (1989).
- 41 On this topic, see Bowersock (1969: 33); Bowie (1982: 31–38); Nixon and Saylor Rodgers (1994: 32–33); Swain (2004: 363–364); Watts (2006: 15–16). More recently Nechaeva (2014: 98–102).
- 42 On this episode, see chapter 3. See also Libanius' *thrill* (*Ep.* 6–7B) at the embassies in which his cousin Spectatus participated, or his letter to Salutius (*Ep.* 127N).
- 43 On the development of the relationship between Christianity and the Classical rhetoric, see Pernot (2002).
- 44 Betz (1986: 22).
- 45 Betz (1986: 16–21); Litfin (1994: 4–18, 246–250).
- 46 Auksi (1995: 144–173) is the main reference on this topic. See also Roberts (1989: 127–129). From the audiences' viewpoint, this had significant consequences Clark (2001: 266): “if late antique preaching was a rhetorical performance, it was the educated elite talking to the social elite in the language of books... . The poor were not having the Good News brought to them”. See also Leyerle (2001: 60–67).
- 47 McLynn (2006).
- 48 Translation taken from Browne and Swallow (1894).
- 49 On this topic, see Eshleman (2012: 50): “early Christian authors too seemed haunted by a sense that their community is under continual threat of infiltration by impostors who are difficult to tell apart from the genuine article”.
- 50 On Paul's religious, theological and Christological tenets, see Bardy (1929: 263–273) and Millar (1971).
- 51 Eusebius' translations taken from Burrus (1989). On this passage, see Burrus (1989) and Quiroga (2013b: 192–194).
- 52 See, among many examples, Pl., *Smp.* 203d; Aesch., 3.137; Eun., VS 6.5.9. Betz estimates that St. Paul rejected two types of rhetoric (1986: 24): “the rhetoric as art of mere persuasion, and the rhetoric of magical manipulation”.
- 53 On the authenticity of the letters exchanged between Basil and Libanius, see Cribiore (2007: 101–102); Silvas (2015); Van Hoof (2016). Translation taken from Deferrari (1934).
- 54 Socrates' translation taken from Zenos (1886).
- 55 Translation taken from White (1996).
- 56 Jul., *Caes.* 309a. Translation taken from Wright (1913).
- 57 On Eunapius' passage, see Penella (2012).
- 58 MacDougall (2017: 105).
- 59 Translation taken from Rousseau (1998).
- 60 Sozomen's translation taken from Zenos (1886). Lugaresi (2017) explores Chrysostom's use of theatrical rhetoric in his criticism of theatrical shows.

- 61 On φιλονεικία in Socrates, see Eucken (2001: 98–102). For this concept in Christian historiography, see Torres Guerra (2017). As Lim (2003: 84) has highlighted, “the public stage of late antiquity represents one of those conspicuous features of civic life that remained more or less impervious to Christianization”.
- 62 Henderson (2011: 25): “early Christian discourse was thus designed in part to reflect and refract the Second Sophistic”.
- 63 Van Nuffelen (2014). See also Maxwell (2006: 35–36): “Just as philosophers dismissed ornate style and complicated reasoning as tools of deception, orthodox Christians accused heretics of being sophists who confused the laity with their deceptive reasoning”.

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3 *All the world's a stage: Libanius' life as a rhetorical performance*

The italicized part of the title of this chapter is an obvious quotation from Jacques' monologue in Shakespeare's play *As you like it*. Jacques' comparison between the world and life with a stage in which we are "merely players" can evoke for us Libanius' way of reflecting on his life as he related many of his personal and professional experiences in the guise of oratorical shows performed on different stages. Theaters, schools, and public spaces of different metropoleis of the Eastern Mediterranean saw him performing. Libanius was in tune with other late antique *papaideumenoí* in presenting himself in front of an audience that he intended to awe with his oratorical flow. What sets him apart from figures like Themistius, Synesius or Himerius is the intensity with which he emphasized his oratorical *agones* or his peers' performances, resulting in reports of *hypokríseis* becoming a topos of his work.

Therefore, far from suggesting that Libanius was a Shakespearian character *avant la lettre*, the intention of the following pages is to look into the narration of his rhetorical performances not only as the main backdrop against which he narrated the events of his life but also as a less explored window into the cultural and social scene of his time. Thus, after a brief review of the studies that have dealt with the rhetorical dimension of Libanius' works, in the first part of this chapter I will focus on the significance that Libanius gave to rhetoric and oratory as inseparable disciplines with a philanthropic mission. Then I will analyze Libanius' *Autobiography* as an oration in which his reports of the late antique oratorical world served him to create his public persona in the context of relevant debates in the religious and cultural landscape of the fourth century AD.

Literature review

The breadth of Libanius' extant oeuvre (more than 1500 letters, 64 orations, 51 declamations, numerous progymnasmata and hypotheses to the orations of Demosthenes) has made Libanius the "front-man" of the literary and cultural

landscape of Late Antiquity.¹ During the first decades of the twentieth century, his brief yet intense relationship with the emperor Julian helped consolidate a view of Libanius as an eloquent albeit unimaginative spokesman for the emperor's failed attempt to reestablish a pagan order.² With the boom of late antique studies, the sophist's speeches and letters featured regularly in studies on different topics of the fourth century AD but were, more often than not, relegated to unelaborated footnotes referring to frequently unedited works that did not receive the attention that they deserved. The studies of P. Petit and A.F. Festugière started to reverse this situation by devoting focused attention to Libanius himself. The translations into English by A.F. Norman (nearly 200 letters and almost a third of Libanius' speeches) and the studies of B. Schouler in the late 70s continued a productive trend that established Libanius as an author in his own right. In more recent approaches to the study of the life and works of the Antiochene sophist, the contributions by P.L. Malosse, A. López Eire and U. Criscuolo have regarded Libanius as a quixotic figure given his inclination to defend and to write on behalf of those who suffered social injustices.³ His speech claiming for better conditions in the penitentiary system (*Or.* 45) or his plea for respect of the pagan temples that were being destroyed (*Or.* 30) exemplify his interest in dealing with contemporary problems in the Antioch of the second half of the fourth century.

It has only been in the past few years that scholars have highlighted that personal interests and a good deal of self-propaganda lie behind this humanist tone, thus advising methodological precaution when reading Libanius' works as they were not disinterested philanthropist manifestos. In the context of this trend, R. Cribiore has dissected the dynamics of the sophist's school and has offered rich insight into the social and religious impacts of his speeches by rendering into English orations that had not yet been translated into a modern language. L. van Hoof has looked into Libanius' autobiographical writings in order to interpret the main narratological strategies of his speeches and letters. Nesselrath's monograph is an abridged yet well-informed work that comprises the main events of Libanius' life and work.⁴ The studies by these three scholars have something in common: they have helped free Libanius from the religious categorization that equated his name with a type of simple and blinkered paganism. Rather, it has been agreed, the driving force and most important constituent of Libanius' oeuvre is the display of the Classical *paideia* and, more conspicuously, the theme of rhetoric in its entire splendor for self-presentation purposes.

Becoming a sophist

The efforts of modern scholarship to clearly delineate the role of sophists in the Roman Empire have always encountered difficulties since their presence in the cultural and social landscape of the period cannot be encompassed by a single definition.⁵ Drawing a public salary and benefitting from numerous exemptions and immunities granted by the administration, the presence of sophists in an Imperial city endowed it with cultural prestige. Among their activities, teaching was deemed especially necessary for the education of the future *pepaideumenoi* and the formation of bureaucrats that eventually ended up working for the administration of the Roman Empire.⁶ The school of Libanius in Antioch has been traditionally pointed to as one of the most illustrative examples of the importance of schools of rhetoric in city life and its economic impact.⁷ But the extent to which sophists retained their influence and continued to play a significant role in the city life after the Christian turn is an issue that has been called into question. Whilst Puech and Malosse considered that the duties they performed on behalf of cities and communities began to be gradually entrusted to other public figures (mainly bishops), Anderson has argued otherwise.⁸ The main underlying issue in this debate is the growing ascendancy of bishops as figures who took over some of the functions traditionally carried out by sophists. Since this is a topic that requires a thorough study attending to diachronic and diatopic criteria that has not been done yet, I prefer to adopt a paradigm that leaves behind a confrontational model. Thus, I will work from the assumption that sophists' authority resented the rise of the figure of Christian elites yet their influence was still felt even during the last decades of the fourth century.

As expected from a dedicated sophist, rhetoric permeates Libanius' oeuvre to an extent that it became his *raison d'être*.⁹ Not in vain did Libanius confess at the beginning of his encomium to Antioch that (*Or.* 11.1) "with good reason we could both be reproved – I, whose life has been spent in oratory, and you, my audience". Starting and developing a career as a sophist asked for that much. From constant references to his main models, Demosthenes (e.g., *Ep.* 47F; 218F; *Or.* 2.24; 3.18.) and Aelius Aristides (e.g., *Ep.* 1534F),¹⁰ to technical advice on specific issues, his devotion to these disciplines made him refuse marriage proposals as he considered his art to be his "bride" (*Or.* 1.54).¹¹ For Libanius, the practice of rhetoric had to be complemented by a moral drive as he credited rhetoric with an extraordinary power in the resolution of political, religious and cultural affairs.¹² Fighting the "irrational impulses of governors" (*Or.* 31.7), praising those who met his highly demanding ethical standards (*Ep.* 40.8–18N), and representing those who asked for his eloquent assistance in trials (*Or.* 1.107–108) were missions that Libanius carried out with the assistance of rhetoric in the belief of its inherently good nature.¹³ But for Libanius, the vast power that rhetoric had in the late antique society

demanded caution in order to avoid its misuses. In an administrative system as enormous and complex as that of the late Roman Empire, officials, governors and emperors were in need of dressing their achievements in the robes of rhetoric (*Ep.* 115.4–5N). In this context, Libanius warns, sophists needed to assess the risk of succumbing to mere flattery when composing panegyrics and encomia to political figures (e.g., *Ep.* 60B). As the sophist remarked in a letter to Anatolius, it was not uncommon to see (*Ep.* 22.3N):

the usual run of sophists, when one of their friends attains such an office as your present one, trotting off to the governor with oration and purse, delivering their oration and proffering their purse and filling it with his help.¹⁴

A different tone, however, can be perceived when it was his turn. In the *Address to Julian*, Libanius admitted that (*Or.* 13.4):

the arrival of each fresh sophist to display his eloquence inspires in me the dread that he may prove a better orator than I, and may depart after upsetting the opinion you used to hold of me.

This oration was a *prosphonetikòs lógos* (a formal address to a ruling figure, as described by Men. Rh. 414.31–418.4) requested, according to Libanius (*Or.* 1.120; *Ep.* 88.2N), by Julian himself in what was the first step in the evolution toward a more meaningful relationship between the sophist and the emperor.¹⁵

In Libanius' eyes, rhetoric worked as a moral compass, yet in order to be fully effective it heavily relied on the psychagogic force that rhetoric displayed on oratorical occasions. As he acknowledged in his oration to his student Anaxentius, the adequate performance of a speech had to be capable of mesmerizing live audiences (*Or.* 55.25):

there is nothing more splendid than a sophist who in the theatre deploys and shapes fitting arguments when even the very people in power realize that he is more fortunate than them because they rule over the bodies of others, while the sophist rules over the soul.

In a similar tone, in a quote resonant with Demosthenes' proclamation of delivery as the apex of rhetoric mentioned in [chapter 1](#), Libanius acknowledged the relevance of crowning any rhetorical composition with a fitting oratorical performance (*Or.* 31.38): "Any subject, however well justified, would not have the same effect if it were carelessly delivered as it would if it were narrated with meticulous care".

Becoming a proficient orator, though, came at a price since oratorical rehearsals and performances demanded a great deal of physical effort. In a passage about the performance of his former student Celsus in a speech addressed to the emperor Julian, Libanius hyperbolically mentions the physical strain involved in an oratorical delivery by telling us that (*Or.* 18.159) "sweat

rolled off them both, from the one the sweat of delivery, from the other that of affection for the speaker”.¹⁶ Writing to Palladius, a well-educated governor of Cilicia (*Ep.* 76.1–2N), Libanius tells us that

early in the afternoon, your slave came and delivered the books. I was going to deliver a speech the next day and the guests had been invited. So I thought it a good sign that speeches had come from one engaged in speechcraft to one who was to deliver a speech... . So if I come out of the ordeal (ἐκ τοῦ ἄθλου), I shall get hold of the works of Aristides and yourself, and shall judge the bout between you.

Libanius’ performance is described in agonistic terms by using the noun ἄθλον, a word linked to physically demanding activities and consistently used by the sophist when he alluded to rhetorical performances. In his letter 45B, for example, Libanius asks the *comes rei privatae* Caesarius to “put Hyperechius [Libanius’ former student] on display in contests (ἐν ἄθλοις)”. Likewise, in another letter he calls ἀθλοθέτης the “umpire” or “judge” of oratorical contests (*Ep.* 1135F: ἐν τοῖς μεγίστοις ἄθλοις).

Learning the particularities of the art of oratory became a must for those who wanted to prosper in the late antique cultural and political scene. The path to become an adroit performer began, obviously, at school. Fourth-century sophists dedicated time and effort to advertize their mastery of oratorical skills since this was one of the most attractive catches to enroll students in their schools. This is how Himerius encouraged and celebrated the declamations of his students as the summit of their rhetorical education (*Or.* 61.2):

I have often heard from other craftsmen, those who use their hands as well as literary craftsmen, that, before beginning instruction, they create examples of their art for those who come to learn it from them, so that the young may thereby learn the arts more easily... . The teacher of eloquence does the same thing so that he may teach the young to venture on speaking by lifting up their souls.¹⁷

This testimony helps explain why accounts of students and sophists practicing and rehearsing their oratorical pieces constitute one of the main narratives of the vibrant portrait of school life in Late Antiquity. It is again Himerius who informs us that (*Or.* 63.7),

since the custom is well-established that in declamation (ἐν ταῖς μελέταις) one practices before entering contests, let me sport [with oratory] in the privacy of my own home and reserve the contests themselves for the great theater.

In these narrations an atmosphere of rivalries between teachers and students gave rise to bitter disputes.¹⁸ In what is left of an oration brimming with Homeric references, Himerius tells us of a quarrel that his students had with those of another sophist. A mixture of empathy and mild rebuke runs through

the oration as Himerius metaphorically reminded all his students to remain focused on their training (*Or.* 65.2): “The lyre does not sound its song if even one string is not properly tuned. We enjoy listening to cicadas, but only when all of them produce their summer song together”.

In this context, late antique Athens has no rival in producing testimonies and episodes about violent rivalries between students from different schools. In Eunapius’ *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* we read about the strife between the students of two sophists, Apsines and Julianus of Cappadocia, that resulted in a trial after the proconsul of Achaëa imprisoned Julianus’ students.¹⁹ At the moment of the hearing of the case, the proconsul forbade the teachers to speak on behalf of his students, even though Apsines had already started his intervention, and only allowed to speak those who had made the speech for the prosecution. This decision ruined the plan of Apsines’ party since it forced Themistocles, the student who had denounced Julianus’ group of students, to improvise an oration. At this point, Eunapius tells us that (VS 484) Themistocles

changed colour, bit his lips in great embarrassment, looked furtively towards his comrades, and consulted them in whispers as to what they had better do. For they had come into court prepared only to shout and applaud vociferously for their teacher’s speech in their behalf... Themistocles was a scandal and a disgrace to his great name.

However, when Prohaeresius, Eunapius’ former teacher, delivered an extempore speech representing Julianus’ party even his antagonists could not refrain themselves from acknowledging his oratorical prowess.²⁰ His first proemium, according to Eunapius, deserved the proconsul’s admiration for “the force of his arguments, his weighty style, his facility and sonorous eloquence”. With the second proemium, the proconsul and Apsines surrendered to Prohaeresius’ oratory and applauded. In his study of this episode, Watts considers that “Eunapius, of course, may be exaggerating Themistocles’ incompetence in order to amplify the difficulty of Prohaeresius’ achievement”.²¹ Exaggeration or not, I think that Watts is pointing us in the right direction: the lines on Themistocles’ incompetence serve to emphasize and contextualize the dimension of the triumphant speech delivered by Prohaeresius, whose biography in Eunapius’ work is adorned with the account of some of the rhetorical *agones* in which he participated (VS 487–493).

The implications of an oratorical fiasco such as Themistocles’ can hardly be overestimated in the extremely competitive fourth-century Athens as serious consequences could derive from an inept performance. In the pages dedicated to Julianus of Cappadocia, Eunapius reveals that he saw Julianus’ house in Athens, in which the sophist (VS 483) “had a theatre of polished marble made after the model of a public theatre, but smaller and of a size suitable to a

house”.²² According to Eunapius, this was not an extravagant whim of Julianus but a reaction to the unstable atmosphere in Athens due to the fierce feuds between the teachers’ students. “Not one of the sophists”, Eunapius continues,

ventured to go down into the city and discourse in public, but they confined their utterances to their private lecture theatres and there discoursed to their students. Thus they ran no risk of their lives, but there competed for applause and fame for eloquence.

In a context that made a teacher fear for his life (perhaps another exaggeration of Eunapius?) and build a theater in his house in order to preserve both prestige and physical integrity intact, a failed performance as Themistocles’ underlines the relevance of rhetorical deliveries in the competitive oratorical milieu.

Similar information can be found in Libanius’ letters and speeches, which contain insightful details on the process of teaching declamatory techniques to the cultural elites who started their training in eloquence at his school. This training involved the practice of different types of exercises (*proagones*, *meletai*, *hamilla*, etc.) in order to develop their oratorical skills.²³ Libanius’ best asset in order to attract more students to his school implied working on and correcting technical aspects of *hypókrisis*. “Didn’t I beseech you to stop hating Demosthenes?”, a desperate Libanius bitterly complained to his pupils (*Or.* 35.16), “Wasn’t I harsh in correcting the language mistakes you made? Didn’t I promise to mend easily many of your errors?” Among these mistakes to be corrected, the control of the voice stood out as it was a non-negotiable requirement that any public speaker should command. As Himerius remarked, (*Or.* 44.2) “a display of the voice’s music is similar, I think, to a demonstration of the body’s strength”. Students at rhetorical schools needed constant practice if they meant to master the tones, modes and intonations of their voices. As an *in loco parentis* figure, Libanius wrote to his students’ parents to update them on their progress. In one of such letters addressed to the doctor Hygieinus, Libanius reports to his addressee on how well his cousins were developing their vocal abilities despite their neighbors’ complaints (*Ep.* 36N):

as for your cousins, you may be assured they are in general highly praised, but in this one particular they annoy the neighbors. They are always rehearsing their declamations at the top of their voices and deprive their next door neighbors of sleep, so that some they have caused to move, others to have a breakdown.

As anecdotic as this scene may seem, the students’ practice and rehearsal seemed to have caused some real civic disturbance. In the *Codex Theodosianus* we find regulations about the distance between classes in order to avoid that (*CTh* 14.9.3) “students and teachers may not drown out each other, and the mingled confusion of tongues and words may not divert the ears or the minds

of any from the study of letters”.²⁴ Besides his consideration toward his neighbors, Libanius’ caveat on the tone of the voice of his students also contains a precautionary note since shouting while declaiming could be likened to effeminacy and an excessive theatricality that could ruin their whole performance.²⁵

Vocal mistakes could be corrected but silence was a burden for future sophists.²⁶ We often find Libanius reminding his students that their rhetorical training and practice in declamations was meant for public display and involvement in social and political issues. Otherwise, their careers would be doomed.²⁷ In *To those who do not speak* Libanius reproached his indolent and lazy former students that they were earning the disrespect and disappointment of the city of Antioch. According to the sophist, rather than participating in what was being discussed at a Council session they remained silent and just gave nods (*Or.* 35.9):

Now, however, one would find that our city shone out especially for the Council’s ability in speaking so that educators spend no small amount of time in oratorical displays. It would be awful not to be shown to be the heirs of this and for the reputation of the city to be destroyed in your lifetime.

Resultantly, silence represented moral and ethical flaws that had to be prevented. For Himerius, silence had a non-Hellenic quality (*Or.* 39.4) “for silence is not Attic, nor is it worthy of the talkative city [of Athens]”. In Libanius’ case, he also endowed silence with an ethical touch that transcended religious allegiances. When the sophist knew that one of his former students, Amphilochius, (*Ep.* 144N) “had adopted a different way of life” (i.e., by becoming a Christian), his shock was assuaged when he learnt that Amphilochius would keep active “his copious flow of oratory” as bishop of Iconium.

The underlying issue regarding silence affected the strength of Libanius’ network of contacts in the Eastern Mediterranean that would be seriously undermined if his students did not live up to the credentials of his school. If they remained silent and inactive in public speaking occasions he would gain the reputation of a teacher unable to produce active *pepaideumenoi* (*Or.* 62.5):

What is it that they say both when they sit around and when they stroll about? That I am good at composing orations, better than most people, but nowhere near so good a teacher. Then they go straight on and ask, ‘Why! What pupil of his has become a leading light in the courts? Or in the position of city councillor? Or in the teachers’ chair? Or in that of the governors?’

These worries prompted Libanius to compose *To his students about his speech* (*Or.* 3), a short oration that was modeled after Aelius Aristides’ *Or.* 33 (*To*

those who criticize him because he does not declaim) in which the Antiochene sophist both rebuked his pupils for their misbehavior and addressed their complaints that he had not delivered the closure speech before his classes were interrupted in the summer. With the composition of this speech Libanius meant to assure the students that he was still in good shape from an oratorical point of view. Not only had he not lowered his oratorical standards, but his audiences could even be heard (*Or.* 3.19) “exclaiming that I have excelled myself, that I was good before, but there is a little bit extra in my speeches now, and old age is no impediment”. However, he complained (*Or.* 3.12–13), his declamations did not manage to attract the attention of his students because they spent their time at class chatting, gossiping about the newly arrived classmates or commenting on races and other spectacles.²⁸

Regardless of how exaggerated his reproaches toward his students were, it is evident that keeping his professional standing as an eloquent teacher in the competitive world of education was the motivation of his oration 3. Although Libanius boasted that, whilst other sophists lived on salaries allotted by the Imperial administration, “the fathers of my students supported me” (*Or.* 1.37), he experienced occasional difficulties to maintain his reputation as a teacher.²⁹ In fact, it was not infrequent that he had to deal with defections of students that left for the school of rival sophists.³⁰ In this sense, it has been suggested that the composition of Oration 3 would have responded to comments of malpractice or decadence in Libanius’ school. Norman has dated this work a little after the Riot of the Statues in Antioch at 387 and the appointment of an official Latin chair in the city at 388.³¹ These two events could have dented Libanius’ morale. He had been outdone by the bishop Flavian in appeasing the emperor Theodosius’ wrath in the aftermath of the Riot of the Statues. At the same time, the presence of a Latin chair in the Syrian capital meant more competition in the educational milieu in a time when the sophist was over 70 years old. “As regards my studies”, an old Libanius reflected in his *Or.* 1.234, “they had now lost ground to Latin even more than before, so that I am afraid that they may, through the agency of law, become completely superseded”.³²

Declamations boring an audience would have constituted the perfect target of Libanius’ puns had it been the case of a rival’s fiasco, but feeling such criticisms himself he felt compelled to compose his Oration 3 as a firm statement that in his late years he still was a top performer capable of instructing his students in oratorical matters. Apart from this motif, his invective at his students’ indifference to his oratory offers another layer of interpretation, one which warns about the dangers of not taking declamations seriously. As pointed out by Eshleman’s study on the dynamics and internal structures of cultural communities in the Roman Empire,

real sophists are those who hear other (real) sophists' declamations. Not only could attending a star's performance provide a career boost, but failing to patronize fellow sophists could be evidence of amateurism.³³

Libanius, therefore, meant to ingrain into his students a valuable habit in the world of late antique *pepaideumenoi* by encouraging them to heed and be aware that what was at stake in the practice of rhetorical deliveries was not only oratorical success but also belonging to the circles of power and influence.

The previous texts have shown Libanius discussing the technicalities and the implications of rhetorical performances. However, even though Libanius devoted his life to rhetoric and oratory, the evaluation of his style and performances has received mixed judgments over time. In his *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists*, Eunapius regarded the sophist's declamations as (VS 496), "altogether feeble, lifeless, and uninspired, and it is very evident that he had not had the advantage of a teacher; indeed he was ignorant of most of the ordinary rules of declamation, things that even a schoolboy knows". R. Criore deems Eunapius' statement contradictory. Right before his negative appraisal of Libanius' style, Criore claims, Eunapius had noted that Libanius benefitted from imitating the "ancient authors". He even admitted that Libanius' public declamations in Constantinople were (VS 495) "full of charm". Criore explains this contradiction by arguing that Eunapius bore a grudge against Libanius since the latter did not take classes in Athens with Prohaeresius, Eunapius' much admired teacher. In Criore's opinion, Libanius' style can be summarized as follows:

his strong disregard of accentual rhythm in ending clausulae made his prose very different from that of the fashionable Himerius and Prohaeresius: it must have sounded flatter and less inspired to some of his contemporaries who liked the 'singing' effect.³⁴

However, as Civiletti remarks in his commentary on Eunapius' *Lives*, the dominant opinion in Byzantine times was very different from Eunapius' assessment.³⁵ Soon after his death Libanius was considered a belletrist whose works were studied and imitated in the late antique and Byzantine period when he came to be known as the "little Demosthenes" or "Demosthenes the Second". Notwithstanding his students' lack of interest and hatred of Demosthenes' works (e.g., *Or.* 3.18; 35.16), Libanius closely followed the Athenian orator's style and persona by fashioning himself as a political counselor of emperors and by using Demosthenes' biographical episodes as a template against which he (re)constructed events from his own life (e.g., *Or.* 1.4).³⁶ His rhetorical adroitness gained him a place in Christian legends and apocryphal texts in which the oratorical prowess of educated Christians such as Basil of Caesarea or Gregory of Nazianzus was proven by their ability to defeat Libanius in rhetorical contests. In the epistolary collection of Basil

mentioned in the previous chapter, Libanius is extolled for his exceptional ability to declaim and perform (*Ep.* 351):

all men gathered together, and that no other man was seen in the city except Libanius alone as he waged the contest (Λιβάνιον ἀγωνιζόμενον), while people of every age listened. For no one thought it good to be absent from the contests, neither he who lived amid a vast and impressive dignity, nor he who stood conspicuous in the lists of eligibles for military service, nor he who was busy in the menial crafts. And at last even women hastened to be present at the contests.³⁷

More to the point is letter 353 in which a euphoric Basil congratulates the sophist “for a living and breathing (ἐμπνουν) speech on earth which Libanius has written, who alone has endowed words with a soul (τοῖς λόγοις ψυχὴν ἐχαρίσατο)”. The choice of words in this letter is interesting as it seems designed to rebut Eunapius’ appraisal of Libanius’ declamations as (*VS* 496) “altogether feeble, lifeless (ἀσθενὴς καὶ τεθνηκώς καὶ ἄπνους)”.

In the ninth century, the polymath Photius (*Bibliotheca*, 90) considered that Libanius’ “imaginary speeches, written for the purpose of giving practice in oratory, are more useful than the rest”.³⁸ Another Byzantine writer, Theodore Metochites, evaluated Libanius’ (and Lucian of Samosata’s) style in his *Semeioseis gnomikai* 17:

although they were both ardent Atticists, they nevertheless appreciated and preferred a pleasant and unconstrained language, so that in those cases where Atticising leads to a departure from normal usage and becomes unpleasant to the ear, they disregard it and prefer not to apply it. They do not like at all to writhe in this manner, since they always prefer an easy language.³⁹

In the Renaissance, however, some intellectuals claimed that the similarities between Libanius and Demosthenes should be revisited. The *Libaniana garrulitas*, it was argued, was worthless compared to Demosthenes’ *eloquentia prisca*.⁴⁰

Both Libanius’ own opinions on contemporary rhetorical performances and the appraisal of his style from Late Antiquity until the Renaissance illustrate that the reputation of late antique sophists and *pepaideumenoí* was forged by failure or success on the field of performative competition. As will be shown in the following section, the theme of agonistic performances as a direct test of a sophist’s worth was completely embedded in Libanius’ *Autobiography*, one of the most informative texts on the cultural and social atmosphere of the fourth century AD.

A performable life. The narrations of rhetorical performances in Libanius’ *Autobiography*

“Individuals can increase their own standing in the public’s eyes only by decreasing that of another... . To be powerful, one needs to display power, and to display power one needs to defeat rivals”.⁴¹ The underlying idea of Libanius’ narrations of rhetorical performances in which he was personally involved can be understood in Whitmarsh’s terms: the harder his many opponents are shown trying to outperform him in the oratorical arena, the more exaltedly he described his eventual success. For this to happen, the sophist inevitably plunged into the “climate of elite competition”⁴² in which the practice of rhetorical performances was envisioned as the key benchmark of the *pepaideumenoi*. Musing about what the aspirations and domains of a sophist should be, Libanius enticed one of his students with the prospect of becoming a prestigious sophist (*Or.* 55.36):

and what about when you will welcome in a large school the students who will transfer there and when you will be challenged to a contest, perform, and triumph and be proclaimed victor?

It was this three-stage process of challenge (εἰς ἀγῶνα προκαλούμενος), performance (ἀγωνιζόμενος) and triumph (κρατῶν) that haunted and enthralled Libanius. This attitude would explain why the sophist paid no heed to the oratorical contests celebrated in the Olympic Games that took place at Antioch: the absence of “orators of great standing” to compete with would have devalued the worth of his victories.⁴³

Libanius’ references to elements related to oratorical performances in his speeches and letters can be anecdotic or part of a larger argument, but in his *Autobiography* (*Or.* 1) accounts of rhetorical performances are credited with more importance since they take center stage, becoming one of the main narrative threads of this work.⁴⁴ These reports, however, are presented as contingent on the will of Tyche, who acts as Libanius’ guardian goddess throughout his oeuvre. Tyche presides over his *Autobiography* as a symbol of both the fortune and luck that he had been allotted. In fact, most of the manuscripts that have transmitted Libanius’ oration have the phrase περὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ τύχης in the title. Tyche was a deity with a long-standing presence in Antioch throughout its history even though the Syrian city had soon become a key location in the process of Christianization – it was in Antioch where the disciples were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26).⁴⁵ Nevertheless, her appearance and use in the sophist’s *Autobiography* is not aimed at bringing about religious disputations but rather as a means to frame the events of Libanius’ life.

Within this framework, the *Autobiography* comprises several carefully balanced themes. Libanius’ intention was to create different yet interlinked scenarios capable of responding to the different situations of an eventful life

such his own. The sophist, for example, resorted to the narration of his physical ailments in order to construct the image of a suffering orator who overcame pains and chronic conditions (e.g. *Or.* 1.9, 17, 142, 143, 245–250). As shown in the previous section of this chapter, rhetorical performances demanded great physical efforts so Libanius' emphasis on his health issues throughout his *Autobiography* should not be taken lightly. In doing so, Libanius meant to follow a long-standing tradition whose main representative was Aelius Aristides, whom he much admired.⁴⁶ Another recurrent theme is that of the sophist devoted to interceding on behalf of his community (in this case, Antioch) in troubled times. Riots, natural disasters and conflicts with the administration are presented as instances in which Libanius acted as the spokesman on behalf of Antioch before governors and emperors (e.g. *Or.* 1.97, 144, 200, 223, 280).

When reading and interpreting his works, it is important to bear in mind that Libanius' stretches of imagination and inaccuracies should be regarded as doors through which the sophist expressed the anxieties, fears and joys of being a sophist in the second half of the fourth century AD. The self-evidently autobiographical nature of Libanius' *Or.* 1 should not delude us into believing that this long oration is a reliable account of his life. Its scope and internal architecture have been scrutinized by modern scholarship. Schouler has emphasized Libanius' ability to indulge in a self-glorifying tone that runs throughout the composition without making himself a hateful figure to his audience. In Schouler's opinion, this literary strategy did not backfire because Libanius presented the episodes of his eventful life as if they were the result of Tyche's will. Cribiore has linked Libanius' *Autobiography* to a well-established biographical tradition that enjoyed great vitality in Late Antiquity, in which self-presentation strategies coexisted with literary references and evoked subtexts. With this approach, Cribiore thinks that Libanius managed to create a consciously exaggerated literary image of himself while at the same time providing enough accurate information as to make his oration qualify as a reliable work. In her study, Cribiore has also highlighted the interplay of those events that feature both in Libanius' *Autobiography* and in his letters, considering their different tone and the different impression we get out of them as genre conventions rather than an attempt by Libanius to falsify or withhold information. More recently Van Hoof has underlined Libanius' dexterity in the composition of the accounts of his actual life as a template against which he created a literary life. Obviously, as Van Hoof notes, Libanius took rhetorical precautions against the risks of forging a new life or praising himself immoderately.⁴⁷

Building on the methodology and findings of these studies, the following pages aim to look into this complex text by exploring the place of narrations of

rhetorical performances in Libanius' *Autobiography* in which the sophist acts both as narrator and protagonist of rhetorical *agones*. My adoption of a deconstructionist approach does not seek to set apart actual historical facts from Libanius' literary inventions and manipulations. On the contrary, an analysis that takes into account their interaction will contribute to explaining the importance of the narrations of rhetorical performances as one of the main leitmotifs that help keep the consistency of a monumental work such as the sophist's *Autobiography*, whose first version was completed in 374 but continued to be written until the times of the emperor Theodosius.⁴⁸

Given the importance that Libanius assigned to rhetoric and oratory, it comes as no surprise that his *Autobiography* is punctuated by what the sophist considered to be his main cultural and professional experiences. The first lines of the work are intended to correct those who considered his life to be either extremely happy or utterly sorrowful: (*Or.* 1.1):

Some people labour under a misapprehension in the opinions they entertain about my career. There are some who, as a result of the applause that greets my oratory, assert that I am the happiest of men: there are, on the other hand, those who, considering my incessant toils and pains, would have it that I am the wretchedest man alive.⁴⁹

These opening lines make sufficiently clear that for Libanius the driving force of his life and the yardstick against which his experiences should be judged was rhetoric. In this way, Libanius was following a family vocation as his maternal grandfather had already excelled in eloquence (*Or.* 1.3: ὄντι λαμπρῷ καὶ ῥητορικῷ). Then he goes on to recall (*Or.* 1.5) that when he turned fifteen he left behind chariot races and other empty entertainments so he could devote himself to his studies without any distractions. The account of his first years of formation, redolent of allusions to the Platonic ideal of education,⁵⁰ begins with a reference to a teacher, now generally recognized as Ulpianus.⁵¹ After his death, Libanius attended the lectures of (*Or.* 1.8) "mere shadows of teachers". This discouraging experience made him realize that he should refrain from composing and speaking until he had memorized all the Classical authors with the assistance of a *grammatistes*.⁵²

It was then that, while reading Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, a thunderbolt (*Or.* 1.9) "hurtled down, blinding my eyes with its flash and stunning my head with its roar". The location of this episode in his account of a formative period bears great significance to Libanius' creation of his public persona as it served him to cast himself as a link in the chain of illustrious orators whose careers had been marked by illnesses. Aelius Aristides' life and work was the obvious choice to use as a template when it came to claiming descent from an ailing intellectual figure.⁵³ In his *Sacred Tales* (V.64–66), we are told that he understood a thunderbolt that struck very close to his right side as an omen

foretelling a positive reputation. Also remarkable is the resemblance of Libanius' episode to a passage from Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* in which we are told about the story of another sophist who suffered the impact of a thunderbolt. Philostratus records that Scopelian and his twin brother were struck by lightning in their cradle. Unlike Libanius, Scopelian (VS 515–516),

was not maimed in any one of his senses ... but was reared under the protection of the gods so carefully that he not only escaped death from the thunderbolt ... but remained with his senses unimpaired, keen-witted, and independent of sleep.

The urge to participate in the sophistic arena came over Libanius and compelled him to go to Athens to complete his formation despite his familial responsibilities and what was expected of him (*Or.* 1.12–13): “I think that I would have followed Odysseus' example and spurned even marriage with a goddess for a glimpse of the smoke of Athens”. By comparing himself to the figure of Odysseus, Libanius imprints an epic flavor on this transitional period of his life when he was torn between fulfilling the duties attached to his biological family or becoming part of the intellectual community of the Eastern Mediterranean. It seems that Libanius did not have very fond memories of his student days in an Athens described with military images and expressions in which Ares, a god not frequently connected to intellectual activities, presided over academic life (*Or.* 1.21): “Thus I took no part in the sallies, skirmishes, martial affrays (ἐφ' οἷς ἔρχεται Ἀρης), and pitched battles”.⁵⁴ Although Libanius wanted to enroll with the prestigious teacher Epiphanius, he ended up studying under Diophantus.⁵⁵ The strong sense of discontent toward a teaching figure, already hinted at in *Or.* 1.8 when calling his teachers in Antioch “mere shadows”, resurfaces as Libanius expressed his disappointment with Diophantus and with the lazy students who were obsessed with school rivalries (*Or.* 1.16, 19–21).⁵⁶ In his biographical account of the Antiochene sophist, Eunapius adds nuance to the causes of Libanius' dissatisfaction, considering that the sophist did not want to run the risk of being overshadowed by his teachers and fellow students (VS 495).

In contrast with the oratorical performances that he had attended in Athens in which (*Or.* 1.17) “the applause that arose was enough to deceive those who experienced it then for the first time”, Libanius boasted of the fact that his oratorical prowess had not passed unnoticed. Thus, together with a fellow Antiochene and an Egyptian, he was considered by the governor of Athens as a replacement for three careless teachers (*Or.* 1.25). Even though these teachers finally retained their positions, this incident convinced Libanius that he was ready to set out on an oratorical tour with his friend Crispinus. Their successful performances in different Eastern cities are barely detailed but are designed as a fitting prelude to Libanius' coming triumphs, presenting a

newcomer gifted by Hermes and the Muses in the world of rhetorical performances (*Or.* 1.29). His first antagonist was a Macedonian orator who challenged Libanius and Crispinus (*Or.* 1.29):

Nor yet did the Macedonian, whose habit it was to set upon travellers passing through Macedonia to their discomfiture, cause any discomfort to us. He engaged with us, indeed, but went off, himself for once discomfited.

Although brief in extension (less than three full lines in Foerster's edition), Libanius attached importance to the episode by constructing a rhetorically dense period in which three verbs (ἔθω, ἐπιτίθῃμι, ταραύσσω/ἐκταράσσω) are used twice. The Macedonian sophist was in the habit of (εἰώθει) setting upon (ἐπιτιθέμενος) other sophists to "their discomfort" (ἐκταράττειν). The repetition of these three verbs helped Libanius not only to add emphasis to his first account of an oratorical adventure but also to show that, as in the abovementioned quote in *Or.* 55.36, he commonly envisioned rhetorical *agones* as a three-stage process. Predictably enough, Libanius and Crispinus were too much for the Macedonian orator who ended up defeated. Both the location of the summary of this tour after his experience in Athens and the ease with which he (and Crispinus) outstripped an experienced sophist (note the emphasis on εἰώθει) served Libanius to annul any objections that may have been made against his claim to participation in the cultural life of Constantinople. These first experiences on the oratorical scene points us to the meta-performative nature inherent to the sophist's *Autobiography*. As Schouler put it,⁵⁷ "*I' orateur se fait acteur*" since Libanius narrates and, at the same time, stars in the oratorical episodes of the *Autobiography*.

A star is born

The newly founded capital offered Libanius everything that could attract a sophist of his ambition and talent.⁵⁸ First of all, it presented a thriving cultural landscape in which (*Or.* 1.30) "many famous men of letters, who came from all over the world to reside there, welcomed us and gave and received their meed of praise". As has been suggested in the previous section of this chapter, for a late antique *pepaideumenos* it was important to interact with and receive criticism from colleagues as part of the process of becoming a permanent member of the cultural elites. Constantinople, therefore, was the place to be for the young and ambitious Libanius. Second, Constantinople provided the sophist an opportunity to establish himself as a teacher. He relates that when he was making inquiries for his trip back to Athens he received an unexpected offer from Nicocles, a teacher that promised him a class of forty students if Libanius collaborated with him. The offer was part of Nicocles' plot to (*Or.*

1.31) “bring down, through my efforts, a nasty, graceless fellow from Cyzicus”, namely Bemarchius. At first, Libanius accepted the offer, but then he sailed back to Athens because (*Or.* 1.33),

I was bound by oath to return, and that was the condition on which I had set out from Athens. To break my word did not seem the fitting prelude to a teaching career, and that was the reason why I sailed away. So I returned and kept my word.

Upon his return to Constantinople, Libanius was shocked when he learned that the city council had requested the appointment of a Cappadocian (*Or.* 1.35) “merely upon the results of a single competition (ἐξ ... τινος ἀγῶνος ἐνός)”. When Libanius questioned Nicocles about the latter’s change of heart, Nicocles reproached him his naïveté and the disconcerting character of his trip to Athens. After this episode, the Antiochene sophist would have left the city had he not had the help and support of Flavius Dionysius, a *consularis Syriae* acquainted with Libanius’ family. It was then that Libanius felt confident again and (*Or.* 1.37),

turned to the public competitions (πρὸς τὰ ἀγωνίσματα). Really, someone else ought to be telling this story, for he would have no personal axe to grind. He would recount the number and the type of orations each contestant made, who won and who lost, who attracted the favour of the city, and how it was no detriment towards gaining the crown not to be supported by the imperial exchequer.

Important aspects of Libanius’ personal and professional experiences in Constantinople are narrated through the lens of rhetorical performance. In the excerpt in which Libanius takes pride in his engagement in public competitions, the use of the plural of ἀγώνισμα should be highlighted (*Or.* 1.37: πρὸς τὰ ἀγωνίσματα). This seems to be purposely contrived in order to set Libanius apart from the Cappadocian sophist who had gained the position that Libanius had been promised. Whilst Libanius’ engagement in *agones* suggests his constant involvement in a more competitive milieu, the success of the Cappadocian sophist was based on a single performance (*Or.* 1.35: ἐξ ... τινος ἀγῶνος ἐνός). This effect is accentuated by the use of a vocabulary full of agonistic overtones to highlight the grandeur of Libanius’ oratorical victories (*Or.* 1.37: νικῶντάς τε καὶ νικωμένους ... ὥς οὐδὲν ἐλάττωμα εἰς τὸν στέφανον τὸ μὴ τῶν βασιλέως ἐσθίειν: “who won and who lost ... how it was no detriment towards gaining the crown not to be supported by the imperial exchequer”). Another aspect that merits attention is how Libanius referred to the origin of the appointed sophist. Stating his place of birth (Cappadocia) rather than his name may conceal another layer of oratorical criticism since there are testimonies of the thick accent that Cappadocian orators were known to have. In his section on the life of the sophist Pausanias, Philostratus states

that (VS 594) “he used to deliver his declamations with a coarse and heavy accent, as is the way with the Cappadocians”.⁵⁹ Also in the *Greek Anthology* we find an epigram attributed to Lucian in a similar vein (XI.436): “You will sooner find white crows and winged tortoises than a Cappadocian who is an accomplished author”. In Libanius’ times, Gregory of Nazianzus tried to refute the arguments against stereotypes of his homeland in Cappadocia as a rustic and unsophisticated place (*Or.* 33.6), including uncomplimentary remarks about the accent of the Cappadocians (*Or.* 33.8): “And will you leave out of your allegations my want of education, and what seems to you the roughness and rusticity of my elocution?”⁶⁰ It would be unsurprising, then, that Libanius capitalized on this commonplace in his critique of the Cappadocian selected by the council of Constantinople.⁶¹

Open criticism of a fellow sophist could have given rise to suspicions of professional jealousy. In order to avoid this, Libanius claims that (*Or.* 1.37) “someone else ought to be telling this story, for he would have no personal axe to grind”. This literary strategy, reinforced by the polyptoton of the pronoun ἕτερος (*Or.* 1.37: ἕτερον τὸν ταῦτα διηγούμενον εἶναι, περὶ ἑτέρου γὰρ ἂν ἕτερος), lends the idea of thoroughness and impartiality by transference to the mouth of an anonymous teller. In this way, Libanius follows Aristotle’s recommendation that when talking about oneself another person should be made to speak in order to avoid giving the wrong impression, which could provoke unreceptive feelings among the audience.⁶² A propos of passages with this tone in the sophist’s works, Van Hoof has drawn attention to Libanius’ use of Plutarch’s caveats against self-praise in his *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively*. Among the rhetorical strategies used by Libanius to cushion the impact of his self-promotion, Van Hoof has argued that putting “praise of himself in other people’s mouths” stood out in the sophist’s writings.⁶³

Libanius’ appeal for an unbiased report in *Or.* 1.37 functions as a rhetorical prelude to the highly biased story of his oratorical rivalry with Bemarchius, a pagan sophist who supported the semi-Arian emperor Constantius II. Surrounded by friends that he frequented in gambling games and drinking occasions (*Or.* 1.39), Libanius tells us that Bemarchius owed his reputation to a single performance – again, the topic of the “one single performance” from the pen of Libanius – that he gave in Egypt, in which Bemarchius delivered on a Christian theme. Envious of and hurt as he was by the students that he had lost to Libanius, Bemarchius’ jealousy did nothing but increase when he attended one of Libanius’ rhetorical performances in Constantinople and failed to strike back in this oratorical duel. According to Libanius’ telling, Bemarchius’ speech (*Or.* 1.40) “proved that mine, which he was attacking, was, for all the approval it had gained, even more admirable”. Bemarchius persisted but his second attempt was not any better when he delivered the speech that

had won him a reputation in Egypt. Libanius continues to relate (*Or.* 1.41),

He rambled on and on about pillars, trellised courts, and intercrossing paths which came out heaven knows where. Meanwhile, the audience looked at one another, and when not a single one of them knew what he was talking about, they nodded and signed to those who were some distance away to inquire whether they were in the same boat.

Although Libanius made the effort to bring himself to applaud his rival in order (*Or.* 1.42) “to make it appear that his dissertation was a model of lucidity”, Bemarchius’ performance was disastrous and made him realize (*Or.* 1.42) “that he had bitten off more than he could chew, for he could not outstrip me in his oratory any more than he could actually outpace me”.⁶⁴

Libanius continues to tell us that Bemarchius resorted to other means to regain his influence in Constantinople. Not only did he ask the governor Alexander not to attend Libanius’ public displays, but he also spread the rumor that Libanius had taken recourse to an astrologer with the intention of harming his opponents (*Or.* 1.43): “he went around with the fairy tale that he had been worsted by magic. I was intimate, so he said, with an astrologer who controlled the stars and through them could bring help or harm to men”. Bemarchius maneuvered to recruit the support of fellow sophists as well as schoolmasters. He also obtained the support of Limenius, a new governor personally linked to him (*Or.* 1.44–45). Nevertheless, Bemarchius’ efforts to put Libanius to trial were in vain. Limenius, who (*Or.* 1.46) “prayed Fortune that his tenure would last at least long enough for him to be able to kill me”, did not obtain anything incriminating from his threats to Libanius’ Cretan copyist, who had been tortured. Without evidence, the governor (*Or.* 1.47) “warned me, through his assistant, not to kick against the pricks, but to be off if I wanted to save my skin. I thought it sheer lunacy to die to no purpose, especially after my triumph in the matter of examination”. After this incident, Libanius decided to leave Constantinople and move to Nicomedia.

If we were to take Libanius’ narration of his rhetorical dispute with Bemarchius at face value, the image of an Heracles-like sophist (as he hints at in *Or.* 1.36) would emerge, one who managed to emerge victorious after being bullied by Bemarchius, a rival who played dirty by making allegiances with has-been sophists that calumniated Libanius (*Or.* 1.38), with schoolmasters and peer-sophists driven by jealousy and fear (*Or.* 1.44), and with the corrupt, recently appointed governor Limenius (*Or.* 1.45–47). Yet, as often happens with Libanius, his version is an exercise of rhetorical manipulation that needs to be interpreted and supplemented to understand its meaning and its role in the *Autobiography*. We shall start by inquiring into who was Bemarchius. Very little is known about him apart from his uncomplimentary portrait in Libanius’ *Autobiography*. His name seems to be linked with an elite family,

according to Janiszewski's prosopographical study.⁶⁵ An entry in the *Suda* and John Zonaras' *Lexicon* concurred in transmitting the same information about him: he was a sophist from Caesarea in Cappadocia who wrote (*Suda* β 259; Zonaras, *Lexicon* I, p. 386) "the deeds of the emperor Constantine in ten books, and also different declamations and orations".⁶⁶ The absence of these two pieces of information in Libanius' text (namely, Bemarchius' birthplace and his literary production) is the first attestation of Libanius' bigoted characterization of Bemarchius, a literary enterprise meant to scorn his first big nemesis in the *Autobiography*. This has prompted Milena Raimondi to point out that Libanius purposely omitted any mention of Bemarchius' homeland as part of his strategy to reinforce the setting of the episode in Constantinople. In doing so, Libanius was comparing the luxuriousness and cultural superficiality that the city had from the sophist's viewpoint with the well-intentioned nature of the rhetoric that he practiced.⁶⁷ With a similarly disparaging intention, Libanius fails to acknowledge Bemarchius' historiographical work on Constantine in order to undermine a reputation that he intended to ruin by reducing Bemarchius' works to the single oration delivered in Egypt (*Or.* 1.39).

Intentionally or not, the absence of information about Bemarchius fits with Libanius' efforts to misrepresent his rival's ethos. First, Libanius presents Bemarchius' rhetorical performance in a tragic style (*Or.* 1.43: ἐτραγῳδεῖ). The verb τραγῳδέω is frequently used by the sophist whenever he wants to convey the idea of verbal exaggerations or emotional overreactions (e.g., *Ep.* 124B; *Or.* 62.26).⁶⁸ Second, we are told that Bemarchius belongs to a circle of friends whose relationship was founded on gambling and drinking (*Or.* 1.39). There is nothing particularly alarming about this since there are testimonies in Greek literature in which symposiastic situations gave rise to or were the fruits of true friendship.⁶⁹ However, Libanius specifies that they drank beyond measure (*Or.* 1.39: τὰ μέχρι μέθης συμπόσια), thus associating Bemarchius and his friends with anti-social and barbaric behavior. In this way, Libanius wanted to set them apart from cultural elite conventions by resorting to "an ironic subversion of the Classical virtue of φιλία".⁷⁰ Libanius' derogatory characterization is sustained by his remark that Bemarchius had made a fortune (*Or.* 1.41) with the speech he gave in Egypt, which associated Bemarchius with the race of sophists motivated solely by money. Similarly, Libanius used the onomatopoeic verb ὑλακτέω ("bark, howl") when mentioning Bemarchius' distress (*Or.* 1.44: "howl all by himself"). Assimilations to animals were a common stylistic trope in Libanius' rhetorical weaponry that, on this occasion, allowed him to liken Bemarchius' behavior to that of wild animals.⁷¹

Third, Libanius continues his invective in his allusion to Bemarchius' journey to Egypt by means of giving an ironic twist to a Homeric line (*Il.*

VI.509 and XV.266: “glorying in his might, with head held high”). If in the *Iliad* this line is part of a simile applied to two Trojans, Paris and Hector, to emphasize their self-confidence, Libanius’ reformulation of the simile seeks to make Bemarchius look hubristic. David Woods has questioned why Libanius was so vague when it came to stating Bemarchius’ motives for embarking on such a journey. After ruling out the possibility that he had been sent to Egypt by the emperor Constantius II, Woods offers two possible explanations: either Bemarchius was invited by the Prefect of Egypt, Philagrius, or the pagan sophist performed his speech during a religious pilgrimage, as Egypt was one of the main bulwarks of late Hellenism. In any case, Woods argues, Libanius could have intentionally distorted the real motives of Bemarchius’ journey (*Or.* 1.27), “since the truth would have revealed both his independent- mindedness and his continued loyalty to traditional religion, traits which Libanius found admirable in anyone else”.⁷² Woods’ hypothesis that Libanius meant to minimize the significance and militancy of Bemarchius’ paganism is not baseless if we bear in mind that Libanius began his presentation of Bemarchius describing him as (*Or.* 1.39) “a staunch supporter of Constantius and the profane crew about him ... although he personally was a worshipper of the gods, he spoke in praise of him who had set himself up against them”.⁷³ In the light of Libanius’ conception of the Classical *paideia* and the Hellenic identity, Bemarchius’ flirtation with a Christian emperor would have made him look like a backstabber.⁷⁴

As for the content of the speech that Bemarchius delivered in Egypt and again in his second attempt to surpass Libanius’ oratorical prowess, our sophist simply states that Bemarchius had spoken in praise of a church built by Constantius II (*Or.* 1.39) and that he (*Or.* 1.40) “rambled on and on about pillars, trellised courts, and intercrossing paths which came out heaven knows where”. Modern translations of Libanius’ *Autobiography* and related studies have traditionally considered that the topic of Bemarchius’ oration was an encomium of the Great Church of Antioch that we find described in Eusebius of Caesarea’ *Life of Constantine* (VC III.50).⁷⁵ However, this interpretation has been contested by two studies. In the first, Raimondi argues that Libanius’ (*Or.* 1.39) τὸν τε ἐναντία τοῖς θεοῖς τεταγμένον, rendered by Norman as “who had set himself up against them [i.e., the gods]”, does not refer to Christ as has traditionally been considered but to the emperor Constantine. Raimondi considers that this passage was part of the sophist’s crusade in defense of pro-pagan policies and against Constantius II’s religious program. Raimondi goes on to interpret that in the phrase (*Or.* 1.39) οἷον αὐτῷ τὸν νεῶν ἐγείραι Κωνσταντίος, τὸν νεῶν should not be translated as “temple”, as Norman does in reference to the Great Church of Antioch, since in this context τὸν νεῶν alludes to the city of Constantinople. Contemporary literary parallels in which

νεώς, usually translated as “temple”, is used to name Constantinople and its Senate are shown by Raimondi to prove that Bemarchius’ speech formed part of Constantius II’s propaganda to promote Constantinople.⁷⁶ In the second study, Woods shares Raimondi’s identification of Constantine as he who had opposed the gods but challenges the identification of the Great Church by proposing the Mausoleum of Constantine at Constantinople, thus rendering νεώς in its primary meaning – temple, a place of worship.⁷⁷ In Libanius’ cultural and religious agenda, any of the three different interpretations of the object of Bemarchius’ encomium would agree with the uncomplimentary tone of his narration of Bemarchius’ unsuccessful performance. The Great Church of Antioch and the Mausoleum of Constantine had evident Christian resonances incompatible with Libanius’ tenets. Similarly, Constantinople evoked in the sophist’s mind non-Hellenic values to which he felt an aversion.

Bemarchius’ reputation of being “a sonorous speaker” was supported by the “rattle and clatter (ψόφω τε καὶ κτύπῳ)” of his words, which did not constitute a positive appraisal. κτύπος evokes a clashing sound, and ψόφος was included by Aristotle as a device of dithyrambic poets to create compound words full of noise (*Rh.* 1406b2), an idea reprised by Dionysius of Halicarnassus when he equates ψόφοι with (*Dem.* 7.17) “a fulsome show of words without much content”. By using ψόφω τε καὶ κτύπῳ, Libanius aimed to underline that Bemarchius’ oratory was a mere display of showmanship due to its mesmerizing sonority. It also should be noted that ψόφω τε καὶ κτύπῳ are placed between two adjectives referring to Christians, ἀμύητους and παρανόμων, thus implying that Christians greeted and welcomed this kind of sonorous oratory. As if that were not enough, Libanius adds that Bemarchius delivered his first speech upon his return to Constantinople smiling (μειδιῶν), a frequent feature among ingratiating sophists (e.g., Philostr. *VS* 537.29; Them. *Or.* 28.343), for he thought that he would not need to put up a fight to overshadow Libanius’ speech. But Bemarchius was soon to become aware of his mistake. Libanius’ word choice informs us that Bemarchius’ *laissez-faire* behavior (*Or.* 1.39: ἀμαχεί) gave way to a more belligerent disposition when he was encouraged by his friends to reply to Libanius’ speech (*Or.* 1.40: προσεπολέμει). And again, after this first defeat, he came back to resume his fight (*Or.* 1.41: ἀναμαχοῦμενος τὴν ἥτταν). This is not a trivial detail: the fiasco of Bemarchius’ first intervention is scarcely noted but more attention is paid to his comeback with the oration delivered in Egypt. Regardless of the nature of the topic of Bemarchius’ encomium, it seems apparent that Libanius wanted to make the failure of that oration dealing with a Christian theme the epicenter of his quarrel with Bemarchius.

One of the most important factors in understanding Libanius’ criticism of his rival’s poor rhetorical performance is in the lines in which he explains that

he shared the audience's puzzlement at Bemarchius' delivery of the speech that he had given in Egypt (*Or.* 1.41) "in order to oblige his company, I tried, by my applause, to make it appear that his dissertation was a model of lucidity (σαφήνεια)". σαφήνεια, applied to Bemarchius with an ironic overtone, was a relevant term in rhetorical and literary criticism in Antiquity. Frequently translated as "clarity" rather than "lucidity", σαφήνεια is a stylistic concept that was considered, according to Aristotle (*Rh.* 1404b), as "the chief merit in discourse, since if it is not clear, speech cannot perform its proper function".⁷⁸ Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Dem.* 58; *Isoc.* 2, 11) regarded σαφήνεια as an oratorical virtue together with vividness (ἐνάργεια), amplification (αὔξησις) and rhythmical composition (εὐρυθμία). Hermogenes (*On Style* 29.1, 31.9), in turn, thought of σαφήνεια as the combination of purity (καθαρότης) and distinctness (εὐκρίνεια). Demetrius' *On Style* (191–203) listed those elements that create or destroy σαφήνεια. In Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*, "clarity" features as a virtue that could be acquire by training (*VS* 621.3 – Quirinus) and thereby used as a basis for judgment that differentiated good sophists (*VS* 510.1 – Aeschines, 607.15 – Antipater) from those whose style was obscure (*VS* 628.16 – Aspasius).

Libanius intended to reflect Bemarchius' lack of σαφήνεια by composing a syntactically loose sentence (*Or.* 1.41: κίονας δὴ τινὰς καὶ κιγκλίδας ὁδοὺς τε ὑπ' ἀλλήλων τεμνομένας ἐμπιπτούσας <τε> οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποι) when briefing on the content of Bemarchius' intervention. In addition, the word choice of this line gives the impression of a description of a vague labyrinthine place as suggested by the use of the indefinite nature of τινὰς and οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποι. Yet it is not easy to ascertain the part of Bemarchius' speech to which Libanius draws our attention. σαφήνεια was a virtue required in the composition of an ἔκφρασις, the type of rhetorical exercise most frequently used in the description of a monument or a city that would have suited the topic of Bemarchius' speech. But σαφήνεια was also important in the construction of narrations. In this sense, it is curious to note that διήγημα, the Greek word frequently used in rhetorical and literary criticism to refer to narrations, is used by Libanius in the form of a participle (διηγούμενος) when he related how Bemarchius "discoursed at length" during his performance.⁷⁹ Either in an ἔκφρασις or in a narration, it seems evident that Libanius meant to note that Bemarchius' speech was flawed in its inability to produce σαφήνεια, something which had further implications beyond risking the loss of attention of a puzzled audience.⁸⁰

Thus, it is not infrequent to find a connection between rhetorical composition and ethics in treatises of literary criticism. In the case of σαφήνεια, it was a concept that also operated outside the literary milieu. Modern commentators on Plato, for example, have pointed out that the

philosopher's emphasis on σαφήνεια throughout his work not only implied criticism of the style of contemporary sophists but also suggested intellectual and noetic flaws.⁸¹ In a not dissimilar way, Coulter thinks that the central role of σαφήνεια in Aristotle's stylistic system

suggests that he perceived a more than superficial connection between stylistic and ethical forms of behavior ... style, too, was viewed by Aristotle primarily as a habitual or gestural, rather than an intellectual form of behavior.⁸²

Consequently, the lack of σαφήνεια in Bemarchius' speech not only accounts for one of the reasons for his deficient rhetorical performance but also implies a blemish in his character that Libanius plays up by bringing to our attention that Bemarchius accused him of having taken recourse to an astrologer (*Or.* 1.43).⁸³ References to magic and astrology were not uncommon in a competitive context such as the oratorical arena, as magic papyri and *tabulae defixiones* make abundantly clear.⁸⁴ Indeed, astrology and magic are a theme that features recurrently in Libanius' oeuvre, especially in the *Autobiography* (e.g. *Or.* 1. 3, 5, 62–64, 98–99, 162, 172–179, 245–250). Although, as Sandwell put it, magic “was always in the eye of the beholder”,⁸⁵ charges of performing these practices were severely punished by the legislation of Late Antiquity.⁸⁶ The title 16 in book 9 of the *Codex Theodosianus* deals with “magicians, astrologers, and all other like criminals”. The dispositions on these are very clear (*CTh* 9.16.4):

No person shall consult a soothsayer or an astrologer or a diviner. The wicked doctrines of augurs and seers shall become silent. The Chaldeans and wizards and all the rest whom the common people call magicians, because of the magnitude of their crimes, shall not attempt anything in this direction... . For if any person should deny obedience to these orders, he shall suffer capital punishment, felled by the avenging sword.

Thus, Libanius could have faced very serious consequences had he been accused and found guilty.⁸⁷

Or. 1.43 was not the only occasion on which Libanius had to face problems involving magic in relation to his oratorical prowess.⁸⁸ In an episode of homeopathic magic that the sophist himself suffered in his last years, a dead chameleon, an animal related to the fickle character of sophists as seen in [chapter 2](#), appeared in his classroom. While suffering from recurrent migraines and having dreams in which Libanius saw (*Or.* 1.245) “two boys sacrificed, and the dead body of one was put in the temple of Zeus, behind the door”, the sophist discovered the chameleon (*Or.* 1.249):

it was an old specimen and had been dead for several months, and we saw the thing with its head tucked in between its hind legs, one of its front legs missing, and the other closing its mouth to silence it.

Diverging interpretations have been offered to explain this episode yet all converge on one point: this was an attempt to ruin Libanius' rhetorical performances as the mouth closed by the chameleon's front leg meant to stop the sophist's oratorical ability while the animal's severed forefoot would impede Libanius' gestures.⁸⁹ Thus it was not without cause that in his oration *On the magical practices* the sophist lamented that (*Or.* 36.3),

people at some future time ... upon hearing of sorcerers, spells, and chameleons, will conceive this as the revenge of persons who believe themselves injured by me and whose behavior, though illegal, is a natural reaction, in the resentment they feel against me.

In spite of the legislation of his time, Libanius did not shy away from mentioning the accusations of using magic and astrology to undermine his rivals' oratorical prowess. Odd as this may sound, this strategy served Libanius to cast Bemarchius as a rumormonger and as a defeated sophist lacking *σαφήνεια* in all the senses of the term.

Libanius' invective against his first major antagonist in the *Autobiography* does not end here. It should be noted that Bemarchius shared with his allies in Constantinople (*Or.* 1.44) "chagrin, fear, and envy" against Libanius. The reference to "envy" (*φθόνος*) is particularly suitable in this context if we take into consideration Aristotle's definition of *φθόνος* (*Rh.* 1386b): "envy also is indeed a disturbing pain and directed against good fortune (*ἐπὶ εὐπραγίᾳ*), but not that of one who does not deserve it, but of one who is our equal and like". The philosopher's definition can apply to the rivalry between Libanius and Bemarchius. Both being *pepaideumenoi*, Libanius was an equal to Bemarchius but was competing against him and doing things right (*εἰς εὐπραγίαν*), which provoked the envy of his peers in Constantinople.⁹⁰ Bemarchius' acrimony toward Libanius should be contrasted with the positive feedback and praise from fellow orators found elsewhere in Libanius' corpus. The sophist confessed that he appreciated the support from colleagues and peers like Megethius, an orator (*Ep.* 74N),

who makes the theatre a scene of triumph for me. His cheers are as loud as fifty others put together, and in this particular way he has often halted me in my declamations. Warm support from a member of the audience is, I feel, of great importance to the speaker for it intersperses the course of the speech with admiration.⁹¹

Appreciation for his rhetoric was especially valued if it came with a note of personal affection reminiscent of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* conception of the figure of the orator in Antiquity. This is the case of Libanius' letter 90N, in which he compliments Eutropius as a worthy pupil of Acacius, the addressee of the letter, since Eutropius

seemed to indicate this relationship not so much by his physical characteristics as by the

stamp of his oratory in which he displays fluency combined with force – your attributes, in fact. He is so good an orator and so a decent fellow that, since he saw that you wished me to receive respect, he has treated me just as he treats you, just as though he were my own nephew and pupil... Every single utterance of mine he listened to, and did not just listen, but listened with approval.

This rhetorical and literary analysis of Libanius' enmity with Bemarchius in Constantinople should not prevent us from looking at this episode from a wider perspective. What seems to be the narration of the vindictive reaction from an outperformed sophist may have had additional motivations in Libanius' agenda. In his biographical record of the sophist, Eunapius states that Libanius left Constantinople because (VS 495),

a scandalous charge was brought against him in connexion with his pupils. I cannot allow myself to write about it, because I am determined to record in this document only what is worthy to be recorded. For this reason, then, he was expelled from Constantinople, and settled at Nicomedia.

It is the current *communis opinio* among scholars that this text refers to a charge of pederasty, which would be part of other accusations brought against Libanius by the Constantinopolitan gang that eventually forced him to leave.⁹² Impossible as it is to reconstruct this story with a minimum degree of veracity, I believe that it is advisable to adopt Van Hoof's opinion on the charges of pederasty against the sophist: "the criticism vented by Eunapius against Libanius had at least some currency in the second half of the fourth century".⁹³

Therefore, if we approach Libanius' oratorical rivalry with Bemarchius through a narratological lens, several interpretations of the passage will arise. In the first place, this episode exemplifies Libanius' typical literary pose when dealing with his opponents in the rhetorical scene. He barely says a word about his own performances but puts his finger on his rivals' sore spots. In the episode with Bemarchius, Libanius hinted at some key rhetorical concepts (principally Bemarchius' lack of *σαφήνεια*) and at a serious imputation leveled against him (requiring the services of an astrologer) in order to transform an oratorical contest into material meant to justify autobiographical or professional situations. In the second place, the account of Bemarchius' deficient rhetorical performance shows Libanius' efforts to manipulate the factual events of his life when writing his autobiographical account.⁹⁴ Deflecting the attention to an oratorical duel and to imputations of resorting to astrology is part, as Van Hoof has shown, of Libanius' ability to play with narrative order and characterization. Thus, the audience of his *Autobiography*, conversant with the pederasty imputation, would have found a veiled allusion to the episode presented in a different garb.⁹⁵ Finally, Libanius' profound antipathy to Constantinople would be understandable for his audience after

hearing the tale of his experience in the capital. Bitter rivalries, foul play and hectoring from members of the cultural and political elites would add up to his consideration of Constantinople as a corrupt and self-indulgent city that contrasted poorly to his beloved Antioch.⁹⁶

In fact, criticism of prevailing performance tastes was used by Libanius to substantiate his profound dislike of Constantinople. In his letter 141N, addressed to Themistius, the sophist wanted to thank the philosopher for the approving and laudatory comments he had made on his oratory.⁹⁷ As a fellow *pepaideumenos*, Libanius felt obliged to reciprocate by saying that (*Ep.* 141N) “your public orations and mine are of a kind and of the same parentage. They are brothers, twins in fact”. He went on to comfort both himself and Themistius for the criticism they had received from those who were capable of (*Ep.* 141N),

out-drinking Cratinus, and out-eating Heracles, reveling in the number of their cooks, and acquainted with the doors of many households, so that they too can say that we are nowhere near enough to them to catch a sight of their heels?

Norman contextualizes the second part of the passage by affirming that Libanius’ criticism would imply that among the audiences in Constantinople

the prevailing fashion was for the Asianic style – the flowery stuff of Himerius or Gregory Nazianzen ... it appears that we have not simply a straightforward opposition of Attic and Asianic rhetoric, but also the covert criticism that these geese in Constantinople behave and sound like the contemporary fathers of the Church, with Asianism a characteristic of their current preaching.⁹⁸

Norman’s suggestion that Libanius integrated into his distaste of the Asiatic style a subtext to lambast Constantinople is based on Libanius’ taste for Atticism, a feature that had been already noticed among his contemporaries.⁹⁹ According to Eunapius (*VS* 496), the sophist cultivated

that quality which the people of Attica call a keen scent, or urban wit... . In his orations you will find the most profound erudition and the widest possible reading. You will meet also with unusual Attic forms and phrases.

As is often the case with Libanius, his rhetorical and oratorical preferences offer a layer of interpretation beyond the literary realm. Thus, in the letter addressed to Themistius, Libanius’ mythological reference to the gluttony, luxuriance and superficiality (“out-drinking Cratinus, and out-eating Heracles”) of the people of Constantinople fit well with the artificial and extravagant character traditionally linked to Asianism.¹⁰⁰ In fact, this type of vocabulary of flamboyancy is consistent with Dionysus of Halicarnassus’ description of the Asianic rhetorical style in the preface of his *The Ancient*

Orators. Libanius uses the same verb (τρυφάω) to characterize the “reveling” (τρυφῶντας) Constantinopolitans just as Dionysius employs it when making an allusion to Asianism (2: τρυφώση). This verb and its noun (τρυφή) are also consistently deployed by Libanius when expressing his antipathy for Constantinople.¹⁰¹

The preference of part of the audiences in Constantinople for the eye-catching and euphonic side of rhetorical performances is reasserted by Libanius in his *Autobiography*. When looking back to his time in the capital (*Or.* 1.76), the sophist states that

I did not relax in the presentation of my orations. Some came to listen to declamations, but the majority came merely to observe my gestures in delivery (οἱ πλείους δὲ θεασόμενοι κινούμενον), for the Senate there was for the most part drawn from the army rather than from the schools. This activity was not at all unsuccessful, but the class I brought with me promptly began to disappear.

In this vignette Libanius represents himself as an accomplished declaimer in whose declamations rhetorical *savoir faire* and dramatic movements converged. But the Senate of Constantinople, Libanius wants us to believe, was formed by a group of literary ignoramuses incapable of understanding his all-encompassing conception of rhetoric. On the contrary, he draws attention to the inability of “the most part” of the Senate to appreciate the whole of his performance, stunned as they were by the non-verbal dimension of his performance. Therefore, observations on the practice of a type of oratory akin to the Asianic style had implications that went beyond the realm of literary criticism. As Henderson has suggested, “deeply internalized in sophistic self-presentation was the competitive valuation of style. ‘Asianism’ may be a largely straw man, constructed in an agonistic culture to give Atticism an opposite”.¹⁰² Libanius was not alone in using the Atticist-Asianism opposition in the construction of cultural and religious identities as well as in sophistic self-presentation in the fourth century AD. Curta’s thorough analysis of the emperor Julian’s *The Heroic Deeds of Constantius* has convincingly proven that the increase in the use of Atticist markers in Julian’s work reflected the development of the emperor’s political agenda. In the case of *The Heroic Deeds of Constantius* Julian deviates from the models he had followed in the first panegyric of Constantius, thus signaling a new direction in his political and religious agenda.¹⁰³ Gregorius of Nazianzus, as mentioned in the previous chapter, used Asianism to characterize heretics by remodeling Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ excursus on Asianism in his survey of ancient orators.¹⁰⁴ Even in the fifth century, Socrates Scholasticus considered the use of the Asianic style worthy of mention in his biographical sketches of leading Christian figures (*HE* 7.27). In the case of Libanius’ *Ep.* 141N, his covert critique of

sophists following the Asianic style was intended to dismiss them from the circle of late antique *pepaideumenoι*. Likening his own orations to those of Themistius (“They are brothers (ἀδελφοί), twins in fact (δίδυμοι)”) was a literary as well as identity-forming statement that sought to leave out those figures inclined to the Asianic style.

Parallel and complementary narrative strategies to those deployed to recount his journey to and stay in Constantinople frame Libanius’ account of his years in Nicomedia. His departure from Constantinople is reported as a new stage in his progression to becoming an accomplished *pepaideumenos*. Whilst he admitted (*Or.* 1.26) that he had left Athens in search of new challenges, his leaving Constantinople was motivated by serious accusations, as an inimical governor and cultural shallowness made his life impossible (*Or.* 1.47). If his post-Athenian tour had provided him with experience and his first oratorical triumphs (*Or.* 1.27–30), after Constantinople he had already won a reputation that preceded him to an extent that the people of Nicaea (*Or.* 1.48) “sent envoys to invite me there, with all kinds of complimentary references in their decrees”. It was not long after he had begun teaching and working in Nicaea that he received an invitation from the curia and the governor of Bithynia to be appointed official sophist of Nicomedia.

The sophist confessed that his time there (from 344 until 349) excelled what he had experienced in other cities as he enjoyed himself in every facet of his life (*Or.* 1.51). His *Monody for Nicomedia* (*Or.* 61), composed after an earthquake followed by a tsunami destroyed the city in 358, reads as one of the most heartfelt and sincere of his works.¹⁰⁵ In Nicomedia he soon engaged in a professional feud that encircles the report of his life and activities in that city. We are told that the city already had a sophist “by no means without skill in rhetoric” (*Or.* 1.49), a detail that Libanius makes sure to highlight in order to set the tone for the account of his oratorical dispute in Nicomedia. The confrontational attitude of that unnamed sophist with the town council earned him a punishment from its members that Libanius put in these conceited terms (*Or.* 1.49):

that he be visited with endless woe, for none of the ordinary methods would last long enough. When they enquired what form this was to take, in answer he spoke of me and my labours against my rivals (τοῖς ἀντιτέχνους).

As had happened when he arrived in Constantinople after accepting Nicocles’ oblique invitation, Libanius again landed in a place of frantic rhetorical activity as the embodiment of justice itself and the antagonist against an ἀντίτεχνος, a graphic compound that maintains the agonistic timbre of his *Autobiography*. These similarities between his feuds in Constantinople and Nicomedia are not serendipitous. It seems clear that Libanius designed a

meticulous plan to present himself as an outsider that had to make his way up through competition when he was outside his native city.¹⁰⁶

The first encounter between the two sophists is described without much detail. Libanius' oratorical performance silenced his rival, a situation succinctly yet efficiently signaled by the juxtaposition of two participles from two antonymous verbs referring to Libanius and his rival (*Or.* 1.50: λέγων σιγῶντα). As a result, his opponent felt more stupid and angry (*Or.* 1.50: ὀργῇ δὲ βραδύτερος ἐγεγόνει). The aggressiveness of the resident sophist impaired his ability (*Or.* 1.50) "to compose first rate stuff". But what ruined his performance was the fact that he suffered (*Or.* 1.50),

hallucinations that he was bewitched, his memory was affected and off he would go, with all sorts of queer words and actions, so that many of his audience, after his lectures, would hide one behind another for fear that, while still in his frenzy, he would fall upon someone and rend him limb from limb.

Following this first incident Libanius inserts an excursus on Nicomedia in which he confesses that there he enjoyed (*Or.* 1.51) "health of body and peace of mind, frequent declamations and excited applause at each of them, throngs of students and their progress, study by night and the sweat of my labours by day, honour, kindness and affection". His melancholic reminiscence ends when the Nicomedian sophist reenters the narrative, accusing Libanius of being responsible for the death of his wife, who had been struggling with a mental illness (*Or.* 1.62). As in his previous experience in Constantinople, Libanius' copyist was arrested to be interrogated but the sophist finally ended up dropping the charges against Libanius and begging the governor not to proceed with an unsubstantial case that could have backfired on him in the absence of hard evidence (*Or.* 1.63).

Desperation took him over and, Libanius continues, he came up with yet another charge: after being ridiculed when it was revealed that he had bribed Libanius' students to attend his lessons (*Or.* 1.65), he went to ask for the assistance of his friend Philagrius, vicar of the Pontic diocese.¹⁰⁷ Philagrius, in turn, made arrangements to have Libanius and seven students that had not deserted him brought over to Nicaea. From this point, the narration adopts a heroic and mythological overtone as Libanius and his students are compared to the Athenians sent to the Labyrinth of the Minotaur (*Or.* 1.67). The sophist also adds to the narration a premonitory dream revealed to him by Heracles in which the body of a disciple of the Cynic Antisthenes quenched a burning pyre (*Or.* 1.67). Although all the odds were against Libanius, there was a happy ending historically framed as the reunion of Athenians and Spartans after the battle of Marathon (*Or.* 1.67). Philagrius' biased predisposition gave way to reason when the praetorian prefect Philippus (*Or.* 1.69) "declared that the time

for favours was past and the law must prevail: he [Philagrius] must either hand in his charge in proper form or reconcile himself to being a victim of necessity". A regretful Philagrius asked Libanius to let him listen to one of his orations in Nicomedia even though Philippus had summoned him (*Or.* 1.70). However, the bitter animosity of the resident sophist persisted. When Libanius was about to begin his performance (*Or.* 1.71) "my accuser entered like an ill wind with that jealous rival of mine, and asserted that his oration ought to precede mine, before the governor was beguiled by the roars of applause". Speaking in front of just fifteen people after asking for the withdrawal of Libanius' supporters, he suffered a new *lapsus memoriae* and could not complete his performance even though he was granted the opportunity of reading his speech from a script. Unsurprisingly, he accused Libanius of wizardry (*Or.* 1.71). The following day only made things worse for Libanius' rival as he tried to attack the Antiochene sophist while he was training his voice for the performance at the town hall. Libanius, "saved by the doors of the temple of Fortune where I was seated" (*Or.* 1.72), saw how this failed attack helped him gain the governor's *captatio benevolentiae* and support as he (*Or.* 1.72) "sent out letters and collected relatives, who happened to be studying under others, and the sons of his friends, and brought them to my school, and mine alone". After that incident, his reputation soared so much that he was called back to Constantinople (*Or.* 1.73–74).

It is difficult to find a more damning portrait than Libanius' sketch of his unnamed rival in Nicomedia. A catalogue of moral blemishes and improper behavior is deployed in order to describe a character driven by θυμός (*Or.* 1.49) and ὀργή (*Or.* 1.50), self-deluded to the point of thinking that he was bewitched (*Or.* 1.50), guilty of incurring in ἀτιμία (*Or.* 1.63) and of attacking a fellow sophist with arms (*Or.* 1.72). The contrast with Libanius' ethos and behavior could not be any sharper. His professional success (*Or.* 1.51–54), his care for his loving mother (*Or.* 1.58–59) and his otherworldliness when it came to financial matters (*Or.* 1.61–62) are boldly underlined. Libanius pictured himself as the epitome of the Classical conception of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* when he narrates that one of his slaves left him after taking 1,500 staters. This event did not stop Libanius from delivering an oration as he had already agreed. On the contrary, he (*Or.* 1.61) "proceeded to give my declamation in my customary manner of delivery, so that I gave cause for wonder on two accounts, by my ability in oratory and by enduring such a loss with equanimity". By adding that he refused to accept a collection of money from different cities, Libanius aimed to construct his image as a deft public speaker impervious to pecuniary rewards.

It can be argued that the characterization of his rival as an angry man is connected to Libanius' consideration of rhetoric as nothing less than a remedy

against feelings like θυμός and ὀργή.¹⁰⁸ In a passage mentioned above, Libanius informed us of the effects and benefits of the Classical *paideia* over the members of the Antiochene city council (*Or.* 11.141): “if they are headstrong it restrains their insolence with the compulsion which philosophy supplies, and with its rhetoric, as it were, lulls their temper (θυμὸν) to rest. The councilors have thus acquired a magic stronger than the governor’s power”. In a not dissimilar manner, the Nicomedian sophist’s θυμός and ὀργή not only deprived him of the civilizing power of rhetoric but also placed him closer to the uncivilized barbarians so accustomed to cohabiting with θυμός and ὀργή. Thus, in a speech intended to appease the emperor Theodosius’ θυμός after the incidents of the Riot of the Statues, Libanius sets ὀργή as the civilizing factor (*Or.* 19.13): “I find the Greeks also to be superior to barbarians. These approximate to brutes in despising pity, while the Greeks are quick to pity and get over their wrath (ὀργῆς)”.

The accusation of magic against Libanius in relation to the unnamed sophist’s memory loss in *Or.* 1.50 may have another layer of interpretation related to the meaning of θυμός and ὀργή in Imperial magical spells.¹⁰⁹ Faraone has shown that the presence of the words θυμός and ὀργή in a number of magical objects and Greek magical spells was meant to weaken or strengthen men’s θυμός and ὀργή together with other abilities (voice, knowledge or impulse of oneself or of an opponent in lawsuits) essential in oratorical performances.¹¹⁰ With this in mind, it would not be entirely preposterous to propose that, when Libanius explicitly stated in *Or.* 1.49–50 that the Nicomedian sophist was dominated by θυμός and ὀργή, he meant to dispel any suspicion that he had resorted to any kind of spells designed to inhibit θυμός and ὀργή, both being “common and expected masculine traits, to be treasured in oneself but feared in a rival wrestler, orator, or lover”.¹¹¹ Therefore, these lines would work as a disclaimer of responsibility for the magic episodes that his rivals were undergoing. Related to magic practices or not, it is highly significant that between the double episode of *lapsus memoriae* that precipitated the failure of the resident sophist, Libanius commented that some of the Nicomedians who (*Or.* 1.55) “had learnt my preludes turned their backs upon other people’s compositions, reciting mine everywhere”.¹¹² The contrast between the Nicomedean and the Antiochene sophists could not be any smoother: while his rival could not remember his own pieces, Libanius left a lasting impression on the audiences that attended and memorized his compositions.

However, by recalling his oratorical feud in Nicomedia, Libanius was not merely attacking the unnamed sophist in order to underline his supremacy in the oratorical arena but was also introducing a subtext that helped him construct his public-self thanks to his ability to use the Classical *paideia* as

part of his rhetorical weaponry. As Cribiore has noticed,¹¹³ this episode of memory loss is modeled on Aeschines' *Or.* 2.35. In this oration, Demosthenes is shown suffering a similar loss of memory, which stopped him from delivering his speech despite the Macedonian king Philip's support:

Philip saw his plight and bade him take courage, and not to think, as though he were an actor on the stage, that his collapse was an irreparable calamity, but to keep cool and try gradually to recall his speech, and speak it off as he had prepared it. But he, having been once upset, and having forgotten what he had written, was unable to recover himself; nay, on making a second attempt, he broke down again. Silence followed; then the herald bade us withdraw.

Aeschines' text contains three accusations that epitomized what an oratorical failure was constituted of, that is, assimilation to the figure of an actor, loss of memory and the final silence of Demosthenes.¹¹⁴ By constructing the *ethopoeia* of the Nicomedean sophist using Aeschines' *Or.* 2.35 as a template, Libanius was ascribing the same flaws to him that Aeschines found in Demosthenes and, therefore, implying charges of amateurism against a rival that did not stand a chance when it came to rhetorical performances.

Libanius' multilayered narration of his rival's failures in Nicomedia bears a number of similarities to that of his feud with Bemarchius in Constantinople. Other than boasting of his own success, Libanius does not provide us with the technicalities of his triumphant rhetorical performances, whilst the main insight into his rivals' performances is the reference to their slippage, for which magic practices appeared to be the culprit. As for the audiences' reactions, the puzzlement at Bemarchius' lack of *σαφήνεια* is substituted in *Or.* 1.50 for the fear among the Nicomedean audience of the violent reaction of the sophist. Similarly, his appropriation of the conception of the orator as *vir bonus dicendi peritus* seems to be at the heart of Libanius' account of the rhetorical duel with Bemarchius and the Nicomendian sophist by linking oratorical fiascos with ethical flaws.¹¹⁵ At the same time, both narrations meant to underline Libanius' struggles and victories in a tremendously competitive milieu as well as to use his rivals' defeats as subtexts suitable for the different issues that his *Autobiography* had to address.

Homecoming

His success in Nicomedia did not pass unnoticed and he was called back to Constantinople (349–353) with the *placet* of the emperor Constantius II.¹¹⁶ On this occasion, the report of his activities in the capital is less detailed with regard to his performances. After claiming that he (*Or.* 1.76) “did not relax in the presentation of my oratory”, the sophist alludes to the aforementioned

passage (*Or.* 1.76) on the inability of part of the Senate to completely appreciate his art other than by contemplating his gestures. The narrative of his second experience in Constantinople is dominated by a gloomy tone. The only beacon of hope comes with the mention of his visits to his much-missed Nicomedia in 350 and 351 (*Or.* 1.77). It was not the case that his work was unappreciated for he received signs of professional recognition from the governors (*Or.* 1.80). He was even proposed for the chair of rhetoric in Athens, a position that he refused to accept (*Or.* 1.84): “I was not so absent-minded as to expect peace and quiet, after all those battles I had seen and the resulting wounds which provided many a doctor with employment”.

At that time, Libanius was scheming to prepare his definite transfer to Antioch. When he was granted a permission of four months to visit his homeland, he made the most of this opportunity by displaying his oratorical prowess in front of his fellow citizens. The sophist idealizes his comeback by making a vivid scene of a declamation that he gave in the city hall. Resorting to Homeric imagery allows Libanius to imprint an epic tinge on the account of his performance in this solo act in which he pays particular attention to the emotions that he was able to arouse in the audience. To begin with, he did not need to invite people to attend but (*Or.* 1.87) “it was enough for them to have the news that I was going to speak”. Such was the expectation that some people spent the night before in the city hall so they would not miss the chance to be present at his rhetorical performance. When the moment of his performance came he had no problems in gaining their *captatio benevolentiae* as Tyche (*Or.* 1.88) “had instilled confidence into me. I gazed upon and rejoiced, as Achilles rejoiced at the sight of his armour”. There is no insight into the content or into the delivery style of the speech but in Libanius’ narration its different parts are marked by the audience’s response. The prologue produced tears and was memorized by not a few (note the rhetorical force of the litotes οὐκ ὀλίγοι) “before they left”. What followed made them frenzied, as suggested by the eloquent noun βακχεῖα (LSJ, “belonging to Bacchus and his rites”) in the text. The performance even urged the gouty to stand up and join the rest of the audience in their (*Or.* 1.88) “clamorous demands that the emperor should restore me to my own folk”.

This enthusiastic account of his rhetorical performance in Antioch introduces in the narrative the sophist that would be his nemesis during his first years back in the Syrian city, the Phoenician Acacius.¹¹⁷ He had gone home for holidays when Libanius arrived at Antioch but Acacius had to rush back when he knew that Libanius’ successful declamation had attracted students that were considering deserting his school after Libanius’ performance (*Or.* 1.90). Upon his return to Antioch, Acacius (*Or.* 1.91) “gave a speech, sure of success, and after it reproved those who had sent for him”.

Being overconfident after his speech and seeing Libanius physically unwell, Acacius forced Libanius to compete in front of the Caesar, Constantius Gallus. Libanius' immodest estimation of his own speech (*Or.* 1.91: "the fame of which has now reached up to heaven") reprises the Homeric overtones of his previous intervention in Antioch.

Once Libanius left Constantinople for good and settled permanently in Antioch, Acacius is portrayed fighting against Libanius to be the most influential sophist of Antioch in a number of episodes whose implications went far beyond the rhetorical realm. However, it is important to note that Libanius' stress on the oratorical aspects of Acacius' defeats was softer than the sophist's reports of his rivalries in Constantinople and Nicomedia. Politics, rhetoric and the recruitment of students as a means to gain influence became the underlying issues entangled in their rivalry. Acacius was supported by one of the *principales* of Antioch, Eubulus. Both opposed Libanius and one of his uncles, Phasganius. Arguments and quarrels among these two couples sprung up. Libanius, for instance, used one of his students – Diogenes – to ridicule Acacius by faking Diogenes' desertion and enrollment in Acacius' group. An exhilarated Libanius narrates (*Ep.* 85.4N),

In his role of pupil he began to escort him as he rode along, but, as he got to his door, he dashed off to my boys who had taken up their positions as spectators of the scene ... we had a huge store of laughter; not even my uncle could forebear to chuckle at it.

Vexation and unrest continued among the two sophists. Petit and Martin consider that Acacius and Eubulus were the masterminds of another charge of magical practices against Libanius.¹¹⁸ In this case, it was a serious allegation that (*Or.* 1.98) "I had cut off the heads of a couple of girls and kept them for use in magic, one against him, the other against his senior colleague".¹¹⁹ This accusation was not only leveled against Libanius but also, as Trzcionka implies, against those with whom Libanius had a close relationship.¹²⁰

Without going into the details of the rhetorical flaws of Acacius, Libanius makes it clear that he was no rival to him. The portrait of Acacius in Libanius' *Autobiography* alternates references to moral blemishes and disputes with insinuations as to his inferior rhetorical stature, which is bluntly stated (*Or.* 1.109):

he was especially dismayed at the number of my declamations, and again at their different types, and he sat puzzling out when on earth I managed to compose my orations, for he had no idea what it was like to burn the midnight oil.

Acacius, Libanius continues in a passage devised to contrast their personalities and commitment to rhetoric, was caught between silence, which no orator could afford, and powerlessness. He tried to avoid oratorical *agones* feeling

inferior to Libanius (*Or.* 1.110):

I fetched the fellow back to the contests, by means of threats from the governor and also to a bigger allowance... . As regards his oratory he had improved, for he had rid himself of some slackness, but not nearly as much as he should have done.

Any trace of Acacius' improvement as mentioned by Libanius vanished in a letter that Libanius addressed to Aristænetus in 355.¹²¹ After consoling his friend on the death of his wife, the sophist went on to bring him up to date on the latest events of his professional activities, in which Acacius is mocked for having remained silent up to three times. The first instance was when Libanius gave a welcome speech to the praetorian prefect Strategius Musonianus while Acacius, referred to as ἀντίτεχνος by Libanius, (*Ep.* 6N) "threatened to deliver a speech, but his discourse went no further than his promise". On the second occasion, Acacius feigned during a speech in defense of the abusive behavior of pedagogues of Antioch but "here too his discourse went no further than his promise" (note how Libanius emphasizes Acacius' withdrawal by repeating the same expression in *Ep.* 6.7N and *Ep.* 6.8N: καὶ τοῦτ' ἦν ἐπίδειξις ἢ ὑπόσχεσις). In the third instance, Acacius remained silent on the death of Zenobius, Libanius' former teacher and for whom the Antiochene sophist composed a monody.

But Libanius reserved the final nail in the coffin of Acacius' reputation for the narration of an oratorical show. Libanius entered the *agon* (*Ep.* 6.11N),

in a declamation on one of those contrived topics, and they began to dance for joy, since that is what they had been brought up in, and when I reached the middle of the oration they began to ask me to write its rebuttal too with the same technique.¹²²

Such a display intimidated Acacius for, Libanius continues (*Ep.* 6.12N), "in his introduction he begged permission to relate his conclusion, but Quirinus refused,¹²³ so he gave himself permission to jump this gap". The bizarre disposition of Acacius' speech left him (*Ep.* 6.12N) "there alone, and the oaths, and all the constraints and bonds and everything else he relied upon to retain his students, had been trampled upon and melted away".

Acacius' departure from Antioch in 361 did not improve things for him. "Some of the notables who have arrived from Palestine", Libanius tells his uncle Phasganius (*Ep.* 14.5N), "say that he is staying there, and they report an unsuccessful declamation of his". Compared to the narration of Libanius' oratorical feuds with previous rivals in the *Autobiography*, a shift in the narrative pattern can be noticed. Rather than aggrandizing his figure as a referential *pepaideumenos*, his capitalization on Acacius' defeats in the rhetorical arena point to local skirmishes and fights over the recruitment of students that would help him uphold his reputation in Antioch during most of

the second part of the fourth century. As Norman has noted, Libanius had different aims in mind when narrating his oratorical battles depending on the location and period of his life: “away from home, he concentrates on being a man of letters; in Antioch he becomes embroiled in local politics and his experiences are not unlike those of the present rival”.¹²⁴

This argument may account for one of the reasons why Acacius does not feature as a monolithic figure in Libanius’ writings. Their relationship did not make a beeline from sworn rivals to friendly peers but Libanius sought to keep the perfect balance of hot and cold when writing about Acacius. The cordial tone of some letters addressed to Acacius (*Ep.* 90N, *Ep.* 101N) in which he even defended him as a fellow sophist (*Ep.* 165C) sharply contrast with the derisory character that Libanius made of him in *Ep.* 85N. When Acacius composed an oration for the emperor Julian, Libanius complimented him for (*Ep.* 90N), “that mass of noble eloquence which you produced first in Phoenicia, then here, and now in Palestine the beautiful”. This praise contradicts Libanius’ own words in *Or.* 1.120, a passage in which he undermines the impact of Acacius’ oration. According to Libanius, the first thing Julian did when he arrived at Antioch was to ask Libanius when he will hear him speaking. “Meanwhile”, Libanius adds (*Or.* 1.120), “my rival was still at home, for his wife was dead and his daughters, now of marriageable age, required his supervision; but rumour had it that, even if his wife had still been alive, he would have left”.¹²⁵ A testimony from Eunapius of Sardes, however, attenuates Libanius’ elation at Julian’s admiration for the Antiochene’s rhetoric: (fr. 26.2 Blockley, from *Suda* λ 486):

Although he was busy with such important affairs, Julian took a great interest in rhetoric. He particularly admired the Antiochene sophist Libanius, partly, perhaps, to praise him, but also to upset the great sophist Prohaeresius by giving more honour to someone else. In any case Acacius, who was a highly skilled rhetorician, and Tuscianus of Phrygia constantly criticized these views.¹²⁶

Libanius’ combination of praise and invective toward Acacius proves that reaching clear-cut and definite conclusions when analyzing Libanius’ works is a difficult task that involves the blending of different types of methodologies. Cribiore’s organic approach to his work has aimed at explaining the apparent inconsistencies of tone and content between his letters and orations (especially his *Autobiography*). Cribiore has stated that “both [i.e., the letters and the *Autobiography*] present a first-person narration with an exclusive affirmation of the ‘I’. On closer inspection, the resulting image is not always uniform”.¹²⁷ In the particular case of Libanius’ relation with Acacius, an unambiguous appraisal of their relationship becomes even more complex since Libanius wrote and delivered an essay entitled *On Genius* (περὶ εὐφυνίας) dedicated to Acacius (*Ep.* 6.13N). Again, it is Eunapius who gives us a different insight into

the professional activities of Libanius when he tells us that (VS 497) “Libanius accordingly wrote an essay *On Genius*, entirely devoted and dedicated to Acacius, in which he clearly ascribes his defeat by him to the man’s great natural talents”. Goulet has interpreted that Libanius’ *On Genius* cunningly purported to elevate Acacius’ rhetorical stature in the cultural arena in order to present him as a suitable candidate for the chair of rhetoric in Constantinople, a position that Libanius wanted to avoid once he was established in Antioch.¹²⁸

Libanius resumed the account of his rhetorical performances in the *Autobiography* by narrating his intervention in Antioch on the first of January 363, the day of the commemoration of Julian’s fourth consulship. The sophist lets us know that, in spite of the importance of the occasion and the (*Or.* 1.127), “thousands who would try to win his support by their songs, he bade me give a speech in honour of the festival”.¹²⁹ But he was not the only speaker summoned to commemorate the occasion. Libanius informs us that an oration in Latin was delivered first (*Or.* 12.92). After this speech, it was the turn of a Greek orator whose performance went wrong. In the first place, Libanius resorts again to the “audience” topic (*Or.* 1.128):

Somehow this success was secured for me in the speech which preceded mine, since some fortune, I am sure, diverted to me people who could cry ‘Encore’ and support me, and who found it paid them not to disparage my work”.

Then, the sophist relishes telling how his peer mishandled the situation:

The previous speaker, since there was none in the company to praise him, spoke in praise of himself, and so provided another cause for ridicule, and he did not cease abusing those who ridiculed him, whereupon they laughed all the more. The fruits of his deceit were lost to him, though he could have retained them, had he realized that, by keeping silent, he could keep his ill-deserved reputation.

His failure, caused by “some fortune (τύχης)”, laid the groundwork for the success of Libanius’ speech that left the two previous orators consoling each other (*Or.* 1.129).¹³⁰

In the brief account of his rhetorical performance Libanius presents himself as being under the patronage of earthly and divine powers. While the emperor Julian had decided that Libanius should be the last one to deliver so (*Or.* 1.129) “there should be the fullest possible audience”, the god Hermes took good care that the audience would be moved and admired by the expressions of “his servant”. With this type of support, Libanius could only give a victorious display of eloquence that made the otherwise placid emperor Julian rise “to his feet in applause, until finally when he could no longer restrain himself, despite his best efforts, he leapt up from his seat and, with outstretched arms, spread wide his cloak”.¹³¹ Anticipating claims against his testimony of the

exaggerated reaction of the emperor, Libanius bluntly states that

anyone who is aware of what it is that makes kingship an object of reverence, would maintain that he stayed within the bounds of what is proper. For what is more royal than that an emperor should be uplifted to the glory of eloquence?

Not in vain, Libanius concludes, (*Or.* 1.130), Julian was an expert in eloquence and rhetoric.

Disguised as a victory in an oratorical *agon*, Libanius' successful delivery at the celebration of Julian's consulship was not only motivated by his fine oratory but also by a peer's deficient performance. As usual, there is an almost customary lack of details when detailing his own rhetorical performances. Libanius barely tells us what his oratorical strengths were that had the emperor Julian leaping up from his seat. In this passage, the sophist is purposely vague by only remarking that the admiration provoked by his expressions (*Or.* 1.129: ὅτι οὖν ὄνομα θαύματος ἄμοιρον ἀπέλθῃ) and the pleasure deriving from his style (*Or.* 1.129: τῇ διὰ τῆς μορφῆς ἡδονῇ) pleased his audience and, especially, the emperor Julian. However, Libanius fails to mention the rhetorical technicalities that may have caused the slippage of the orator who performed in Greek except that Tyche was behind the diversion of his rival's audience. He resorted to self-praise and verbal abuse to deal with the adverse situation,¹³² a dire and disastrous response that only fueled more laughing at him as Libanius makes sure to let us know by the repetition of the term "laughter" both in the form of the noun γέλως and the verb γελάω (*Or.* 1.128: δευτέρῳ τούτῳ παρέχων ἀφορμὴν γέλῳτι, τοὺς δὲ ἐπ' αὐτῷ γελάσαντας οὐκ ἀνίει λαιδορῶν, οἱ δ' ἄν αὐθις ἐγέλων).

As has already been commented, self-praising (*periautologia*) was not completely unacceptable in the ancient world but it was meant to be used according to specific circumstances.¹³³ But in the case of *Or.* 1.129–130, Libanius does not blush when narrating the success of his rhetorical performance because he differentiates this form of self-praise from that of the sophist who spoke before him. Libanius was not wrong in praising his own performance as it has been judged by the emperor himself and carried out under the care of a divine figure, the god Hermes who (*Or.* 1.129) "in his care for his servant, stirred every member of the audience with his wand, so that no single expression of mine should pass without its share of admiration". Under these circumstances, self-praise would not be regarded as an egotistical exercise but as a way to credit Hermes with the success that Libanius' speech had met with.¹³⁴ In fact, according to Plutarch's *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively*, the mediation of a god excused those who spoke about themselves as a way (542e) "to disburden themselves, as it were, of honour, letting part of it rest with chance, and part with God". On the contrary, his

rival's *periautologia* is described as a desperate and hubristic measure through means of deceit (*Or.* 1.128: δι' ἀπάτης) that reminds us of Plutarch's conclusion to his treatise on self-praise (547F):

if we remember that praise of oneself always involves dispraise from others, that this vainglory has an inglorious end, the audience being left ... with a feeling of vexation, not with any belief in the truth of the self-portrait, we shall avoid talking about ourselves unless we have in prospect some great advantage to our hearers or to ourselves.¹³⁵

In Libanius' eyes, his unnamed rival failed to comply with Plutarch's conditions for praising oneself.

Libanius' account of this oratorical *agon* has more to it than the mere narration of his opponents' mistakes and flaws in the larger picture of his *Autobiography*. These lines were written under the reign of the Christian emperor Valens, a period during which Libanius needed to keep a low profile and to measure his words in order to foreground a narrative in which his affection and support for Julian would not make him fall out with anti-Julian governors and officials encouraged by the current Imperial policy. Reporting his oratorical victories under the eyes of Julian himself at a time in which his social presence decreased must have been a relief and, as Van Hoof has pointed out, may have been exaggerated to glorify his achievements under the rule of Valens.¹³⁶ In this disadvantageous context for Libanius, the association of oratory and religion felt in *Or.* 1.127–130 can be read as a subtle manifesto of his ideology, one founded on his belief that (*Or.* 62.8) “religion and oratory (ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι) are, I am sure, interconnected and inter-related”. *Hiera* would be represented in this episode by the ever-present Tyche that diverted to him a greater number of people from the audience. As for *logoi*, the narration of his successful rhetorical performances in *Or.* 1.127–130 can be interpreted both as a *laudatio temporis acti* and a statement of his disdain for Latin, symbolically defeated in this passage in front of the emperor by his speech in Greek. As Wiemer has put it,

as he grew older, he increasingly felt that the time-honoured study of Greek literature was in danger of being ousted by the rival studies of Latin and Roman law that seemed to offer a more practical preparation for a career in the imperial service. For Libanius, who firmly believed in the educational value of Greek rhetoric and who was a professor of Greek rhetoric himself, it was essential that the emperor used his powers to prevent this from happening.¹³⁷

After Acacius settled definitively in Palestine and Julian died during his Persian campaign, Libanius' concern for oratorical duels seems to start fading from the narrative of his *Autobiography*. The sophist was growing older and beginning to resent political changes and the competition of a new generation characterized by cultural patterns with which he was not completely familiar.

Health was not kind to him either as aging worsened his gout and arthritis – and also his hypochondria.¹³⁸ In the 370s, however, a relapse of his health problems did not stop him from continuing with his activities, although (*Or.* 1.142) “declamations were out of the question” because of the physical strain that they exerted on him.¹³⁹ In a passage modeled on Aelius Aristides’ experiences, he informs us that his condition improved after Asclepius recommended he resume taking the medication he used to drink. The god honored him with three visions that (*Or.* 1.143) “removed a great part of my ailment”. This improvement of his health helped him ready his speech for the emperor Valens, “a narration of his achievements, from which the emperor seemed to derive more pleasure than he had done from their performance” (*Or.* 1.144). The length of the oration demanded a second session for its complete delivery but this was denied by some of the closest acolytes in the emperor’s entourage as “they felt no fear if others spoke of this, but such a declamation from me scared them to death”. Contrary to previous accounts of oratorical feuds, the allusion to these enemies (*Or.* 1.144: λεγόντων δὲ ἐτέρων) is rather vague and unsubstantial.¹⁴⁰

The information that Libanius conveys in the several additions to the first version (from section 1 to 155) of his *Autobiography*, completed in 374, is much less elaborated than previous examples when it came to the narration of rhetorical performances. Mentions of his performances from that period served him to prove that in the Antioch of the 370s and 380s he was still a relevant figure connected to governors and high-ranking officials. Thus on the appointment of the *magister militum per Orientem* Richomer as consul, Libanius composed a speech for the occasion of which he confessed that (*Or.* 1.220) “whether it was more effective than those of others, I cannot say, but at least I honoured him with all the means at my disposal”. His carelessness on the comparison with other sophists does not mean that the sophist’s competitive zeal had vanished, as he goes on to say that news of this speech reached the emperor Theodosius. Being “already an admirer of mine”, Theodosius expressed his intention to come to Antioch “just on my account”. In a similar vein, he acknowledges the praise he received for his encomium to the *magister militum* Ellebichus, although this oratorical success was not narrated to highlight a rival’s defeat but to state that the positive reception of his piece comforted him after the death of his secretary (*Or.* 1.232). The dutiful and nonchalant mood with which his late oratorical activities are narrated (e.g., *Or.* 1.223, 267) should be contrasted with the tone of other works in which he vented his frustrations. It should be clear by now that Libanius was not adorned by unpretentiousness and nor was he especially prone to self-criticism, so he demanded from his audiences a response as enthusiastic as his efforts to perform had been great. In a passage of his bitter oration 2, the

sophist immodestly admits that (*Or.* 2.23),

I have no good word for the applause that greets them [his declamations] on each occasion, however great it may be, since I regard it as less than it deserves to be; I demand fresh compliments above and beyond the normal; I receive their acclamations like a graven image and honour the plaudits with never a glance, gesture or smile.¹⁴¹

Libanius' rhetorical standing in the political and cultural scene was put to the test again in 387 when a violent episode took place in Antioch, the Riot of the Statues. According to the five speeches that the sophist composed about the Riot (*Ors.* 19–23) and John Chrysostom's twenty-four homilies transmitted to us in the corpus *On the Statues*, the Riot started because an extraordinary tax was levied by the emperor Theodosius, which provoked the hostile reaction of *honorati* and *curiales*.¹⁴² It did not take long before the protests turned into an aggressive demonstration encouraged by the theatrical claue that ended with the desecration and destruction of the statues and portraits of the Imperial family. Arrests and executions ordered by the *comes Orientis* ensued before the emperor Theodosius learned of the Riot. When he was briefed on the situation, Theodosius tasked the *magister officiorum* Caesarius and the *magister militum* Ellebichus with the investigation of the episode. In John Chrysostom's homilies *On the Statues*, it was the bishop Flavian who went to Constantinople to appease Theodosius' wrath. Libanius' version (*Ors.* 19–23), on the contrary, affirms that Caesarius was fundamental in achieving the emperor's final pardon. The sophist reserved for himself an important part in the unfolding of the events. In the proemium of his *To the Emperor Theodosius about the Riots*, he wrote that (*Or.* 19.2),

I have come self-elected and though I regard it of great consequence to be able to achieve all I could wish, my actual efforts for my native city are, I feel, of no little moment, even though I should not succeed in attaining my end. I shall be judged, I believe, by my intention rather than by the lack of the means to grant me its fulfillment.¹⁴³

However, Libanius admitted in his *Autobiography* that he did not leave for Constantinople but remained in Antioch after the riotous events (*Or.* 1.253):

But for this salvation I personally was held responsible. With orations and tears I soothed the members of the newly arrived commission of investigation and began to induce in them an eagerness for petitions, so that in a little while petitions came thick and fast. Let me regard this as the work of Fortune, and also the success of the numerous orations, each with its own variation of style, composed by me on the same theme.¹⁴⁴

There are arguments to explain the discrepancies between these two contradictory versions provided by Libanius. His self-portrait as an old aching man who volunteered to go to Constantinople should not be regarded as a strategy to provoke the pathos of his audience, cognizant as it was of his

presence in Antioch. Rather this should be considered an attempt to draw attention to his role as “an old man in a young’s man world”.¹⁴⁵ This strategy was framed within an intertextual play with John Chrysostom’s homilies *On the Statues*.¹⁴⁶ In his oration 19, Libanius aimed to replicate John Chrysostom’s account of the actual and persuasive embassy on behalf of the Antiochenes performed by one of the bishops of Antioch, Flavian. In homily twenty-one of Chrysostom’s *On the Statues*, Chrysostom highlights Flavian’s sacrifices in undertaking a journey to Constantinople:

he exposed his life for all; and while there were many things to hinder him, such as the winter, his age, the feast, and not less than these, his sister, then at her last breath, he raised himself above all these obstacles.¹⁴⁷

Writing in the first person, Libanius fictionalized his efforts in his false embassy by using Chrysostom’s text as a template (*Or.* 19.3):

So, though my advanced years bid me stay at home, as do many of my friends and relations, who could be heard telling me that it was not safe to plead such a case before an emperor in his wrath, I have deduced from your character and conduct that there will be no untoward consequences for me from my remarks.

Since it was a well-known fact that Libanius had not undertaken the journey to Constantinople, a hint of farce can be felt in this nod to some of the obstacles that Flavian’s mission encountered in Chrysostom’s report. Consequently, the account of Libanius’ fake journey and performance in front of Theodosius did not aim to put the spotlight on what actually happened but to construct the “performable ethos” of a *pepaideumenos* still active and competitive against other public figures.

In the sixth added section of his *Autobiography* composed in the summer of 388, we can still find a relatively well elaborated account of an oratorical fiasco in which elements from previous episodes resonate. Libanius chastised an unnamed Christian *Comes Orientis* by resorting to the abusive language available from the subgenre of the rhetorical blame. Wantonness (τρυφή), stupidity (ἀνοητότερος) and the acquisition of wealth by unlawful means (ἀδικίας) feature in the description of the *Comes Orientis* (*Or.* 1.255). Libanius strongly resented the *Comes* for his way of getting back at him after the sophist protested against the cutting of the cypresses of Daphne, a suburb of Antioch that was an important sacred pagan settlement in the Syrian capital where a temple of Apollo had burnt down in 362.¹⁴⁸ According to Libanius (*Or.* 1.255), “he became my foe and tried to bring me down through teachers, first of Latin, then of Greek”.¹⁴⁹ But the Greek orator brought to defeat him hardly managed to threaten Libanius as he suffered an episode of stage fright that left him (*Or.* 1.256) “tongue-tied” and “speechless”. Despite his efforts to pull

himself together, eventually “a mist came over the eyes of the speaker as he retired and of the governor who stayed seated there”. Libanius here reprised one of his favorite topics when he intended to finish off a rival, the silence of an orator (*Or.* 1.256): “he was better off for his silence ... even death, to my mind, could not have been a worse punishment than this”. Silence, as has already been discussed, equated to ostracism from the cultural elites and the spheres of power. The combativeness of the “late Libanius”, as U. Criscuolo put it, is evident throughout this passage with his persistent denunciation of the political and cultural maladies of the last decades of the fourth century AD, embodied in this case by the Christian *Comes Orientis* and the defeated speaker.¹⁵⁰

Libanius’ flow of eloquence grew dimmer. The death of his son Cimon was a blow that he could hardly withstand yet (*Or.* 1.280),

by the grace of heaven, my oratory stayed upon my lips as before, and this was what prevented my enemies setting up a howl of triumph. Though I was unable to appear in the lecture room, I fulfilled my duties towards my students.¹⁵¹

It is his letter 191N that seems to signal the moment when Libanius came to terms with the decreasing attention that his performances were receiving. Writing to Theophilus in 393, Libanius resignedly tries to sooth his friend’s anger over the low expectation and the poor number of people that attended the sophist’s public appearances:

what you expected was a rush from the marketplace to the City Hall on the part of our foremost teachers, with excitement, applause, rejoicing, good will, and thanksgiving to the gods ... still at your protests and bidding I was carried along under duress. And not one of them turned up at all, or more precisely, out of all that number a couple did so, and I think the absentees will punish them for it. So, as I told you, I found this a joke, for my prophecy came true and I know that they will want me dead.¹⁵²

His prophecy and the gloomy tone of these lines were contradicted by the subsequent fortunes of his work. Libanius the Sophist died only to become the “second Demosthenes”, one of the towering figures of rhetoric throughout Byzantine times.

Notes

¹ Outlines of Libanius’ biography can be found in Cribiore (2007: 13–30); Melero Bellido (2001: 7–17); Nesselrath (2012: 11–36); Van Hoof (2014a: 7–9). On the authorship of some of his works, see Foerster and Münscher (1925); Penella (2014b).

² Misson (1914: 4–6).

³ E.g., Criscuolo (1995); López Eire (1992); Malosse (2007).

- 4 Cribiore (2013); Van Hoof (2014a); Nesselrath (2012).
- 5 Among the many attempts to define the main features of sophists, see especially Bowersock (1969); Bowie (1982); Pernot (1993); Goulet (2014: vol. I, 225–244). For a definition of “sophist”, see especially Puech (2002: 12): “*Le terme «sophiste» peut donc prendre des nuances différents, de même que, selon le contexte, ses connotations peuvent être laudatives, pejoratives ou neutres, souvent chez le même auteur*”.
- 6 On the educational impact of sophists in the wider context of the Roman Empire, see Cameron (1991: 82): “The orators did not advocate upsets to the political or social system; rather, they confirmed its structure and reminded their audiences of its articulation and of their place within it. The vocabulary and tropes were familiar because, by using this technique, the orators were more likely to impress and reassure, while the whole was perpetuated and supported by an educational regime designed to equip men to write and speak in exactly this manner”.
- 7 See Cribiore’s seminal study on this topic (2007).
- 8 Anderson (1993: 44–45). See also Malosse (2011); Puech (2002: 6, 23–35); Swain (2004: 363). For a more nuanced position, see Criscuolo (1995) and Van Hoof (2014b).
- 9 Aelius Aristides, one of Libanius’ main literary models, had a similar approach to rhetoric. See also Downie (2013).
- 10 It is interesting to note that Demosthenes and Aristides, two of the main literary influences of Libanius, featured in a dream that Aristides had. In his *Sacred Tales* Aelius Aristides tells us that he dreamt that he was Demosthenes delivering a speech to the Athenians (I.16) or that he had been given an altered version of Demosthenes’ *On the Crown* (IV.97).
- 11 Libanius, who (*Or.* 1.12) “would have followed Odysseus’ example and spurned even marriage with a goddess for a glimpse of the smoke of Athens”, was to be married to a cousin that died unexpectedly (*Or.* 1.95). Libanius lived with a concubine, commented on by Eunapius (*VS* 496).
- 12 See, for instance, his enthusiasm when celebrating the revival of the practice of rhetoric and eloquence upon Julian’s ascension to the power in *Or.* 13.1–2; 18.157.
- 13 On Libanius’ use of rhetoric in the political milieu for the people’s benefit following Classical conceptions of *parrhesia*, see Schouler (2011).
- 14 In a similar tone, Lib. *Or.* 40.17. Penella (2007: 207–271) includes the translation of the many orations dedicated to officials that Himerius, a sophist contemporary to Libanius, composed.
- 15 In his *Ep.* 92N Libanius acknowledged that despite the praises his *Or.* 13 had received the work was not good enough. It did not elude Libanius that he had not been the only one to deliver a welcome address to Libanius. In *Ep.* 88.3N he mildly reproached Celsus, the governor of Cilicia, because “you too are among those who have delivered orations and had judgment passed upon them, when the gods were at hand to assist you from the altar and to encourage you to warm to the task, but so far from sending me your oration, you did not even write to tell me that you had delivered it”.
- 16 Examples of the physical strain to which sophists and orators were exposed to can be found in Philostratus’ *VS* 541, 543 or 598. On the physical stamina demanded in declamations, see Penella (2014a: 344–366).
- 17 Himerius’ translations taken from Penella (2007). As Penella has highlighted (2014b: 109), “the dissemination of a sophist’s own declamations would have been a good way for him to

advertise his skill in 'the crown of the curriculum' to prospective students and to their parents and grammarians".

18 Watts (2006) is a seminal work for this topic.

19 For a commentary on the date and incidents of this episode, see Penella (1990: 81–83) and Watts (2006: 50–53).

20 On Prohaeresius' intervention in this episode, see Goulet (2014: vol. I 208–221, vol. II, 238–243). On the consideration of extempore speeches in the Imperial period, see Montes Cala (2011: 126–129) and Penella (2014a: 341–344).

21 Watts (2006: 53 n. 20). See also Penella (1990: 85–93).

22 On the ambiguity of the term "theatre" (θέατρον) in late antique authors, see Raimondi (2012: 381).

23 Apart from Criatore (2007), on Libanius' school see also Johansson (2006: 13–19); Penella (2007: 156–206); Russell (1996: 5–15). The activities and syllabi of the Imperial and late antique school system have been at the center of modern scholarship: Criatore (2007: 147–196); Goulet (2014: 289–292); Penella (2007: 157–158), (2011, 2014b: 108–110, 118–122); Pernot (1993: 63–65); Watts (2015: 52–55).

24 Translation from Pharr; Davidson and Pharr (2001). On this topic, see also Criatore (2007: 154 n. 92). Similar complaints can be found in Seneca's *Ep.* 56.

25 Bers (2009: 58–60); Serafim (2017: 84–86).

26 On Libanius' interpretation of silence, see Quiroga (2013).

27 Brown (1992: 43); Flower (2013: 35); Penella (2007: 218); Watts (2015: 38).

28 As Criatore has pointed out, the caring and devoted figure of Libanius as a teacher that appears in the letters gave way to a sophist that (2013: 26) "suffers from acute resentment toward young men, convinced that they are indolent, distracted by the allure of other disciplines, and interested only in quick monetary gain". See also Norman (2000: 183–185); Penella (2014a: 334–337).

29 For this matter, see Criatore (2007: 153); Norman (2000: 158). Some of Basil of Caesarea's epistles addressed to Libanius (*Epp.* 335, 336, 346, 349, 350) deal with the former's recruitment of students in Cappadocia for the sophist's school. On the authenticity of these letters, see Van Hoof (2016).

30 Himerius' *Or.* 35 is an informative reading on this topic. Lib. *Ep.* 94B is a curious letter addressed to the governor of Syria, Alexander, in which Libanius begs him not to belittle his fellow teachers by pressuring fathers to send their sons to his school. Similar issues in his *Or.* 1.53, 65–70, 100. On this topic, see also Goulet (2014: vol. 2, 267).

31 Norman (2000: 169–170).

32 It is important to bear in mind Norman's specification on Libanius' views on Latin language (2000: 176): "What irks Libanius is not the existence of Latin teachers but their pretensions to primacy over his own system". On Libanius' comments about Latin, see *Or.* 1.154, 244; 39.17; 40.5–7. Criatore (2015: 24) informs us that "in letter 539 = R152, Libanius confessed that he needed Olympius' language skills in order to make his students 'strong in court'. Having failed to appropriate Latin by including it in his curriculum, his attitude became antagonistic in the speeches written in the 380s and later". See also Criscuolo (1993); Heath (2002: 434); Schouler (1999: 454–455); Wöhrle (1995: 76).

- 33 Eshleman (2012: 41). The dynamics of this system partook of Libanius' advice to his students. In his apologetic *Against critics of his educational system*, the sophist inveighed against one Heliodorus for being a parvenu as he went from being (*Or.* 62.46) "a hawker of fish-pickle" to appearing as an orator when he substituted "the friend with whom he was lodging" as the latter fell ill in the course of a law-suit
- 34 Cribiore (2014: 66). Among other opinions on Libanius' prose and delivery style, see for instance Ameringer (1921: 25); Goulet (2014: vol. II, 272–273); Van Hoof (2014a: 8); Malosse (2014: 105–106); Pérez Galicia (2011: 85–86); Russell (1983: 5); Schouler (1984: 27–34). Penella (1990: 104) comments that the second part of Eunapius' judgment "may be dismissed as vilification" and that his appraisal sought (1990: 108) "to disabuse the reader of the notion that Libanius was the quintessential sophist of the second half of the fourth century" due to professional and personal reasons.
- 35 Civiletti (2007: 632).
- 36 On this topic, see Bompaire (1984); Cribiore (2007: 150–151, 2013: 10–17); Martino (1998: 68–71); Malosse (2014: 85–90); Nesselrath and Van Hoof (2014); Pernot (2006: 65–67). See also Johansson (2006: 140, 153, 166, 188, 191, 235, 239, 2011: 43–44) for interesting references of nineteenth-century studies on Demosthenes' influence on Libanius', and for examples on how the sophist composed some of his declamations using Demosthenes' writings as a model. On Demosthenes' stature in Imperial times, Pseudo-Lucian's *In Praise of Demosthenes* is an interesting source.
- 37 In a similar tone, Basil's *Ep.* 348: "you [Libanius], who make parade of your declamations (τῷ ταῖς μελέταις ἐμπομπεύοντι)".
- 38 Translation taken from Wilson (1994).
- 39 Translation taken from Johansson (2006: 17–18).
- 40 Sanchi (2011: 21).
- 41 Whitmarsh (2017: 44).
- 42 Flower (2013: 33).
- 43 Liebeschuetz (1972: 138).
- 44 Cribiore (2007: 92, 2013: 49–54).
- 45 On the presence of Tyche in Antioch, see Eldinow (2011: 26–27); Norman (1992: 11–14). It would be interesting to compare Libanius' consideration of the impact of Tyche on human lives' with that from the opening paragraphs of Galen's *Exhortation to the Study of Medicine*.
- 46 Norman (2000: xix). Lançon (2014) has compared the narratives of illness in Libanius' and Augustine's works.
- 47 Schouler (1993); Cribiore (2013: 38–75); Van Hoof (2014a).
- 48 On the chronology of the composition of this work, see Van Hoof (2014a: 11–16).
- 49 In his *Ep.* 78N Libanius also remembers past days of oratorical glory as the happiest of his life. Van Hoof (2014a: 9) draws our attention to the sophist's "claims to correct (ἐπανορθῶσαι) other visions of his life".
- 50 Norman (2000: 148) refers to Plato's *Laws* (789b) and *Republic* (553d) as Libanius' references against which to model his early education.

- 51 On the problems of identification of the several “Ulpianus” of whom we have information and its (or their) appearance in Libanius’ works, see Cribiore (2007: 73); Janiszewski; Stebnicka and Szabat (2015: 373–374). On Libanius’ ambiguous opinion on Antioch’s teachers of rhetoric, see Cribiore (2014: 61–62).
- 52 Melero Bellido (2001: 68) proposes Didymus as the name of this *grammatistes*.
- 53 Miletto (2017); Norman (2000: 149); Pack (1933).
- 54 Basil of Caesarea (*Epp.* 1, 223) confessed that he was not happy with the time he spent in Athens either.
- 55 Biographical details of both sophists can be found in Janiszewski; Stebnicka and Szabat (2015: 100, 104–105).
- 56 See Cribiore (2007: 91–95).
- 57 Schouler (1993: 308).
- 58 Penella (1990: 102) thinks that “careerism” was Libanius’ motivation to move to Constantinople.
- 59 See Goulet (2014: 269–270).
- 60 Translation taken from Browne and Swallow (1894).
- 61 See Métivier (2005: 10–11).
- 62 Arist., *Rh.* 1418b: “In regard to moral character, since sometimes, in speaking of ourselves, we render ourselves liable to envy, to the charge of prolixity, or contradiction, or, when speaking of another, we may be accused of abuse or boorishness, we must make another speak in our place”. Translation taken from Freese (1926).
- 63 Van Hoof (2014a: 34–35). See also Norman (2000: 157–158). A review of the attitude to self-praising in Imperial times can be found in Fields (2008); Miletto (2011); Pernot (1998); Spatharas (2011); Watson (2003: 78–81).
- 64 Norman translates πρὸς τῷ Νικοστράτῳ τοῦ Ἰσοκράτους καταφρονῶν (literally, “that he had disdained the art of Isocrates as well as that of Nicostratus”) as “he had bitten off more than he could chew”. Norman (2000: 159) says that the proverb is “unknown but probably of comic origin” as nothing is known for certain about this Nicostratus other than the reference in this proverb (Paroem. I. 395). Martin and Petit (1979: 217) say that this proverb would be better understood if Nicostratus were a runner. They do not provide evidence but base their assumption in Libanius’ *Ep.* 843F (147N) in which he boasts of a student that is “good at running his course and in eloquence, and who deserves both the victor’s crown and the scholar’s gown”. Finally, Janiszewski; Stebnicka and Szabat (2015: 261) take for granted that this Nicostratus is the rhetor mentioned in Philostratus’ *VS* 624 and Suda (v 404).
- 65 Janiszewski (2006: 372–373) derives the etymology of his name from βῆμα and ἀρχή, which would result in “the first at the rostrum” or “the one who rules the rostrum”. This, in turn, would indicate “that Bemarchios’ family was part of the intellectual elite or running elite in some Cappadocian city”.
- 66 An overview of the information available on Bemarchius can be found in Janiszewski (2006: 371–380). On Bemarchius’ work as a source for the composition of Libanius’ encomium of Constantius and Constans (*Or.* 59) or Eunapius’ *History*, see Janiszewski (2006: 373) and Raimondi (2003: 172).
- 67 Raimondi (2003: 180–181).

- 68 In a similar sense, see the use of *τραγωδέω* in Them. *Or.* 21.263b.
- 69 König (2012: 9); Konstan (1996: 49).
- 70 Watson (2010: 137).
- 71 Casella (2011: 60–62).
- 72 Woods (2006: 430–431).
- 73 For Bemarchius’ paganism, see Van Hoof (2013: 398).
- 74 Stenger (2014: 272–273, 278–279, 284).
- 75 Henck (2001: 293); Martin and Petit (1979: 115–116); Melero Bellido (2001: 95); Norman (2000: 158–159); Wintjes (2005: 82).
- 76 Raimondi (2003: 177–193).
- 77 Woods (2006: 432–434).
- 78 Translation taken from Leshner (2010a). See also Kennedy (1991: 221), for whom Aristotle’s attention to *σαφήνεια* “is consistent with his stress on logical proof in the earlier books and his dislike of the style of sophists”.
- 79 For the role of *σαφήνεια* in an *ἔκφρασις*, see Hermog. 10.23; Theon 118.6. See also Nünlist (2009: 197); Zeitlin (2013: 17). On the use of *σαφήνεια* in the rhetorical exercise of narration, see Aphth. 10.2; Theon 79.20–28. See also Meijering (1987: 224–225).
- 80 In this sense, see Becker (1995: 25): “a writer achieves clarity and vividness by using a style that does not distract the audience, one that does not call attention to itself or remind the audience that words are creating what it sees”.
- 81 See, for instance, Leshner (2010b: 178–181).
- 82 Coulter (1976: 17). See also Leshner (2010a: 144). The conjunction of style and thought is even more evident in *On the sublime* 9.3–4: “For it is impossible that those whose thoughts and habits all their lives long are petty and servile should produce anything wonderful, worthy of immortal life. No, a grand style is the natural product of those whose ideas are weighty”. Translation taken from Fyfe (1995).
- 83 See also Libanius’ invective against Polycles, who in the company of a man named Helpidius had spread the rumor that the emperor Julian had bribed a court doctor in order to poison his own wife Helena. Libanius acrimoniously reproached Polycles that (*Or.* 38.17) “you twisted my words about the stars and the assistance they provide, and made hostile to us people, whose (concept of) Destiny we censured, reporting these words to them, wronging me and flattering them, placing your hopes for the most important matters – such as offices and marriages – in their evil arts”.
- 84 A comprehensive overview in Tremel (2004); Trzcionka (2007: 42–51, esp. 78–79, 103); Webb (2008: 159–160). Magic and rhetoric shared a common vocabulary, as shown by Hesk (1999: 211–212) and, especially, by De Romilly (1975). Swist (2017) has recently investigated the implications in the real world of Libanius’ references to magic and sophistry in his *Declamations*.
- 85 Sandwell (2005: 113).
- 86 On the degree to which magic was part of Libanius’ system of religious beliefs, see the opinions of Misson (1920); Sandwell (2005: 111–118); Wöhrle (1995). I adopt here Trzcionka’s caveat about drawing conclusions as to the presence of magic and astrology in late antique

- literature (2007: 63): “the inclusion by antique authors of the accusations and trials does not necessarily reflect an increase, or isolated occurrence of them; rather it reflects the individual motivations of the authors as well as the survival of their particular works”.
- 87 It is curious to observe that in some cases Libanius endowed the relationship between magic and letters with a positive value (*Or.* 11.141) as in Antioch “the councilors have thus acquired a magic stronger than the governor’s power”.
- 88 Criore (2015: 49): “astrology and magic were not neatly separated, and, as is well-known, they pervaded virtually all aspects of life in the ancient world”. Brown (2004) has interpreted the strong presence of magic in the sophist’s work as a sign of his “ill-defined power” in the wider picture of fourth century AD.
- 89 The literature on this famous episode is plentiful: Bonner (1932: 39); Cracco Ruggini (1996); González Gálvez (2002); Maltomini (2004); Marasco (2002); Sandwell (2005). Similar examples are to be found in the Greek Magical Papyri (in particular VII.396–404; IX, 1–14), see Betz (1986).
- 90 On φθόνος (“envy”) in oratorical contexts, see Criore (2007: 92–93) and Trzcionka (2007: 68–70), who sees in φθόνος the main motive that triggered Bemarchius’ accusation against Libanius. On the relationship between magic and φθόνος in Ancient iconography, see Dumbabin and Dickie (1983).
- 91 On clagues supporting orators, see Korenjak (2000: 124–127).
- 92 Becker (2013: 503); Goulet (2014: vol. II 270). Wintjes (2005: 86) considers that the accusation of pederasty was the most important among other imputations. Civiletti (2007: 629–630) adds that Eunapius used this passage in order to enhance his literary characterization of Libanius as an ambiguous character, while Penella (1990: 103) thinks that Eunapius “distorts in singling out that one charge and in failing to note the context of professional rivalry and competitiveness within which such a charge would have been made”. In the fifth century, Socrates Scholasticus believed that Libanius had left Constantinople due to his professional discrepancies (*HE* III.1).
- 93 Van Hoof (2014a: 29–30). Against her opinion, Morris (2016: 124) thinks that “accusations of pederasty could have been risen much later and been read back into the events of his departure from Constantinople”.
- 94 As De Temmerman ponders (2016: 13), “ancient biographical texts too show a clear tendency to subordinate factual, historical truth to different aims”.
- 95 Van Hoof (2014a: 31–33). See also Trzcionka (2007: 76–80).
- 96 Criore (2007: 60) points out that he barely kept any contact with teachers working on Constantinople.
- 97 On Libanius’ and Themistius’ professional relationship, see Criore (2007: 62–66) and Watts (2015: 93–96).
- 98 Norman (1992: vol. II, 287–289).
- 99 On the complications presented by these two terms, see Caragounis (2013a, 2013b); Curta (1995: 179–180); Kim (2010: 472–473); Pernot (2005: 81–82, esp. 144). It should be noted that Penella doubts the extent to which Eunapius’ lines on Libanius’ Atticism should be taken at face value (1990: 105). Criore (2007: 53) estimates that “Libanius preferred not to engage openly against rhetors who followed other fashions”.
- 100 See Doulamis (2011: 37) with numerous references to modern literature on the topic. Vessella

(2018) is a recent contribution to this topic which I have not been able to read as it came out when this book was completed.

- 101 Saliou (2011: 155–156). An opposite view on Constantinople can be read in Himerius' *Or.* 41. Apart from Dionysus' text, classical references on Asiatic rhetoric can be found, among others, in Cicero (e.g., *Brut.* 325) and Quintilian (XII.10.16–26). Philostratus elaborates on the Atticism of some of the orators whose life he narrates (e.g., *VS* 568).
- 102 Henderson (2011: 26–27). In this sense, see also Curta for whom Atticism was (1995: 180) “as a *koine* of the Greek-speaking, highly cultured members of Late Roman society”. In similar terms, Stenger (2014: 271–272).
- 103 Curta (1995: 183–188).
- 104 MacDougall (2017).
- 105 On Libanius' rhetorical treatment of this catastrophe, see Watts (2014: 42–48). See also Cribiore (2015: 27–30).
- 106 Cribiore (2013: 50): “philosophic or sophistic competence was generally expected to arise from reliance on a line of predecessors; in emphasizing his isolation at the beginning of his career, his self-sufficiency, and his choice to model himself exclusively on authors of the past, accessible to him only through further study, Libanius intended to project himself as a figure of monumental proportions”.
- 107 PLRE Philagrius 5.
- 108 On the place of *θυμὸς* and *ὀργή* in the rhetorical milieu, see Viano (2003).
- 109 The importance of mnemonics as a discipline in ancient rhetorical theory can hardly be overestimated, although Heath (2004: 267) is right in advising an “agnostic view” on the information we have on the prodigious memory of ancient people. See, for instance, Athanasius of Alexandria on his *Life of St. Antony*, 3: “he was so attentive at the reading of the Scriptures lessons that nothing escaped him: he retained everything and so his memory served him in place of books” (translation from Meyer 1950). An overview full of Classical references to the place of memory in ancient rhetoric can be found in Pernot (2005: 65–68).
- 110 Faraone (2003).
- 111 Faraone (2003: 153).
- 112 In a similar sense, see also Lib. *Or.* 1.88 and *Or.* 3.17.
- 113 Cribiore (2013: 47–48). On Aeschines' influence on Libanius' prose style, see Martino's thorough study (1998: 72–89).
- 114 Silence features as the main theme in Libanius' *Or.* 41.
- 115 Himerius' *Or.* 15.2 encapsulates this notion: “Virtue rules and presides over eloquence. Eloquence, like an adept servant of a good queen, executes and carries out virtue's commands with all haste”. Himerius' translations taken from Penella (2007).
- 116 Van Hoof (2014a: 28) considers that this “was probably part of Constantius' efforts at the time to promote the recently refounded city of Constantinople as a rival to Rome, where his brother Constans held sway”.
- 117 Janiszewski; Stebnicka and Szabat (2015: 12) express their concern about the difficulties of differentiating the several “Acacius” that appear in Libanius' corpus. See also Goulet (2014: vol. I, 491–492); Martin and Petit (1979: 228–229); Norman (1992: 155). Acacius is always

referred to as ἀντικαθήμενος in Libanius' works (Or. 1.109; 43.2; 52.31), a term that makes Bry (2014: 136–137) think that he was a full sophist in Antioch.

118 Martin and Petit (1979: 231).

119 According to Norman (1992: 165), the target of this practice would be the Caesar Gallus and the emperor Constantius II.

120 Trzcionka (2007: 77).

121 On the career of Aristaenetos 1, see PLRE (1971: 104).

122 Norman (1992: 369) emphasizes the stress on the sophistic and agonistic nature of the vocabulary, *Ep.* 6.11N: ἀγωνίζομαι δὴ τινα ἀγῶνα τῶν ἐν τοῖς πλάσμασι τούτοις.

123 On Quirinus, see PLRE (1971: 760–761).

124 Norman (1965: 162).

125 In turn, as Norman (1992: 187) shows, there is an alternative version to the first meeting of Julian and Libanius (*Ep.* 88N).

126 Translation taken from Blockley (1981–1983).

127 Cribiore (2013: 44).

128 Goulet (2014: vol. 1, 491–492).

129 This oration would become his *Or.* 12, *To the Emperor Julian as Consul*.

130 *Or.* 1.127–128 have textual lacunae that have added difficulties to the reading of the obscure Greek of these lines. As a result, there were doubts as to the number of orators who delivered that day. Scholarly consensus seems to have been reached, though, after the interpretation of Petit and Martin, who think that there were three orators in the celebration of Julian's consulship: Libanius, the Latin orator and (1979: 244) “*peut-être un sophiste venu exprès de Constantinople*”. Norman (1992: 193), correcting his previous interpretation of the passage (1965: 184–185), and Melero (2001: 146) have followed their reading. On Libanius' dislike of Latin, see Wiemer (2014: 215).

131 As Norman suggests (1992: 195–197), this passage should be read together with Lib. *Or.* 18.154–156. An equally enthusiastic reaction of the audience is also found in Libanius' *Or.* 40.22. See also Goulet (2014: vol. I, 222–225).

132 Philostratus' *VS* 579–580 narrates how the sophist Philagrus faced upset audiences during his career.

133 Libanius himself had to dispel rumors of excessive self-praising in his *Or.* 2.15: “Haven't you learnt this from other sources? If it weren't for them, you would be unaware of my triumphs, as far as I am concerned. Of the statues of me and the decrees passed about them by many great cities, you have never heard a word, though you may perhaps do so – but certainly not by my telling”.

134 It is tempting to suggest that Libanius was here following Aristides' conception of self-praise as developed in the latter's *On an incidental remark*. See Fields (2008: 160–166).

135 Plutarch's translation taken from De Lacy and Einarson (1959).

136 Van Hoof (2014a: 25–27) and Watts (2015: 137–139).

137 Wiemer (2014: 209). In similar terms, see Nesselrath (2014: 253).

138 *Or.* 1.24 provides one of the few instances in which Libanius confessed to have been in good

health, working “day in and day out, save those reserved for official holidays, and they were not many”.

- 139 On this topic, see his *Or.* 3.5. See also Pack (1933)
- 140 Norman (1965: 190–191) thinks that Libanius attributes the prevention of his continuing with his speech to “a combination of religious prejudice and professional jealousy” behind which were Christians orators close to Valens. See also Martin and Petit (1979: 249). Wiemer (2014: 197) considers that Libanius played down this incident “as the sophist had no interest in depicting himself publicly as a *persona non grata* at the imperial court”.
- 141 It is noteworthy that in his *Or.* 41 Libanius wanted both to comfort and to reproach the distressed governor Timocrates because the latter had not been acclaimed in the theater.
- 142 On the events and consequences of the Riot of the Statues, see French (1998); Quiroga (2007); Van de Paverd (1991). On the exact number of homilies of Chrysostom’s *On the Statues*, see Valevicius (2000).
- 143 On the dynamics of embassies in Late Antiquity, see Nechaeva (2014).
- 144 In his *New History* Zosimus gave credit to Libanius’ embassy (4.41).
- 145 Watts (2015: 195).
- 146 Quiroga (2014).
- 147 Translation taken from Budge (1842).
- 148 On this incident, see Libanius’ *Or.* 60 *Monody on the temple of Apollo in Daphne*. It is also mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus (22.13).
- 149 The mention of “teachers of Latin” refers to the official chair of Latin instituted in Antioch in 388.
- 150 Criore (2013: 41–42); Criscuolo (1995); Watts (2015: 195–197).
- 151 In a similar tone, see also his *Ep.* 193N: “My old age has withdrawn me from the lecture rooms, but it has not robbed me of the work of my hand”.
- 152 On the issue of the control he had over the regularity and size of his audiences, see Lib. *Or.* 2.23, 25.

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4 Conclusions

“Speech indeed is very commonly an index of character, and reveals the secrets of the heart” (*profert enim mores plerumque oratio et animi secreta detegit*).¹ In the case of this book, it has not been the secrets of the heart, as Quintilian’s quote states (*Inst.* XI.1.30), but self-presentation strategies and personal interests that have been revealed through the analysis of how speeches were narrated in late antique sources. This type of narrative took two principal forms: self-praise of the author’s performance, and invective when it came to commenting on an antagonist’s *hypókrisis*. In ancient literary criticism both praise and invective were frequently dealt with together. In fact, Aristotle attempted to describe them in this fashion: (*Rh.* 1368a 11–14):

Such are nearly all the materials of praise or blame, the things which those who praise or blame should keep in view, and the sources of encomia and invective; for when these are known their contraries are obvious, since blame is derived from the contrary things.²

This intertwined relationship between rhetorical encomia and invectives closely resembles the dynamic of the narrations of rhetorical performances in late antique literature. The references to technical issues (e.g. gestures, inflections of the voice, the strategies to influence the audience’s reaction, arrangement of the *officia oratoris*, etc.) by which praise of performances were composed also furnished the tales of oratorical fiascos by means of a subversion of the appraisal of the very same issues.

These two forms of narrating *hypókriseis* were interconnected yet are found with unequal frequency in late antique literature, since thorough reports and information provided by an author about his own oratorical performances are difficult to find. For every time we find Libanius providing explicit information about his performative skills, the Antiochene sophist offers several more instances highlighting his peers’ failures with attention to all the details surrounding the performance. This fact should hardly surprise us. Although elaborate comments on one’s *hypókriseis* could give us valuable insights into the mechanisms of self-fashioning in Late Antiquity, this strategy was deployed less frequently as it could backfire and be misunderstood as a self-aggrandizing portrait on the part of the author. The ethical implications of self-

praise in inappropriate or unjustified contexts, such as those mentioned by Plutarch and Aelius Aristides in their works on *periautologia*, had to be taken into account, as this rhetorical strategy had to be carefully managed in order to create the right effect.

This is the main reason why the most frequent form of narrative was the criticism of an antagonist's performance. In a highly competitive society in which a member of the elite's value was defined by the cultural stature of his fellow *pepaideumenoï*, narrations of an antagonist's flawed rhetorical performance were designed to strengthen the author's status and to undermine the position of his rivals. What is more, deviations from the rhetorical canons and precepts were associated with undesirable moral blemishes that could ruin a career.³ The prevailing conception of sophists and orators as representative of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* ideal indicates that a deficient performance was considered a chink in the armor through which cultural and religious dislocations of the ethos and identity of these figures could be perceived. Throughout this work, for instance, texts from all periods have consistently warned orators against the danger of being assimilated to the socially inferior figure of the actor if vocal ploys and gestures were inappropriate or excessive. Accordingly, narrations of deficient rhetorical performances intended to point to a disruption in the flow of cultural or religious modes as well as to assert control over the making of cultural and religious orthodoxies.

In this sense, the strongly biased nature of the sources dealt with in this book has proven very telling of the competitiveness of the late antique cultural scene, as their prejudiced rhetorical criticism has allowed us to investigate how the narrator's cultural and religious standards were projected when commenting on the performances of rival figures in a specific milieu. Within this framework, late antique authors articulated a poetics of exemplarity, that is, the setting of a rhetorical standard with moral implications that served them to both advance their positions and to undermine the status of their rivals in the competitive society of the fourth century AD. In this way, I believe that it is possible to think of narrations of rhetorical performances as an identity marker of cultural and religious figures in Late Antiquity. As Corbeil and Gleason have already noted, criticism of a poor *mise en scène* did not merely entail literary accusations of twisting the conventional rules of rhetoric but also gave rise to notions pertaining to culture, politics and religion.⁴

In these pages, therefore, it has been my intention to prove that the narrations of victories and defeats in the late antique oratorical arena can be approached as a cultural discourse flexible enough to be adapted by authors with different (and, on some occasions, opposing) agendas in their attempts to construct a public persona. In the case of Themistius and Synesius, two of the

most significant philosophers of Late Antiquity, their narrations of a *mise en scène* performed by sophists, charlatans and showy orators were meant to remind their audiences of how different these figures were to philosophers. Both authors were consistent in resorting to the motif of the excessively ingratiating speaker as a slave to his audience and, therefore, responsible for trivializing rhetoric and oratory by degrading it to mere theatricalities. In doing so, Themistius and Synesius assumed that one of the tasks of a philosopher consisted of controlling (or, at the very least, advising on) the dynamics of public discourse. Thus their reprobation and denunciation of oratorical shows devoid of pedagogical content was meant to identify them as bona fide *patres comunitatis* capable of sheltering people from rhetorical fireworks. This discourse of “inclusion and exclusion” from influencing circles can also be felt in Christian texts. The oratorical precepts indebted to the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* tradition were accommodated to Christian discourse, which implied a reformulation of some traditional codes. If, for Cicero, Quintilian or Themistius the trespassing of the boundaries between rhetoric and acting had moral and cultural implications, in the Christian context it involved the labeling of the speaker as a heretic. Theological disputes and religious debates, therefore, were frequently held in the form of rhetorical *agones*.

In the case of Libanius, the sophist diversified the content and form of his narrations of rhetorical performances in order to make them fit into his personal and professional agenda rather than into a wider context. It is true that a sense of *déjà écouté* pervades the numerous accounts of his feuds (especially in his *Autobiography*); and yet, in each instance, there were important nuances that help put each episode into context. In Libanius’ *Autobiography*, rhetorical performances only take on the qualities of texts with social and cultural implications second hand, that is, when their actual performativity has become part of a literary narrative intended to make a point. In most cases, Libanius used oratorical and rhetorical criticism as a medium to pinpoint the cultural or religious agenda of others – an agenda, of course, he was interested in discrediting for different purposes.

In short, rhetorical performances were one of the most important ways of articulating a code for members of the late antique cultural elite. As long as this code (in Averil Cameron’s terms, “the rhetoric of the Empire”)⁵ was respected and its display was approved of by audiences and peers, social advancement and increasing influence were the habitual prospects. Otherwise, the competitive late antique cultural landscape could ruin the career of any elite member. If the mastery of the Classical *paideia* was considered in Late Antiquity to be a *sine qua non* of speaking the language of power, the ability to produce self-interested narrations of rhetorical performances was one of its

most important dialects. As the saying goes, “it is not enough to succeed. Others must fail”.

Notes

- ¹ Translation taken from Russell (2001).
- ² Translation taken from Freese (1926).
- ³ Bers (2009: 9) coined the term *evitanda* to refer to this type of rhetorical and oratorical slippage.
- ⁴ Corbeill (2002: 197–208); Gleason (1995: 74–76).
- ⁵ Cameron (1991).

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Index

- Acacius 118, 128–132, 136, 148n117
- Achaea 95
- Achilles 46n75, 128
- Actors 3, 7, 10, 22, 26–28, 30, 32, 35, 37–38, 44n40, 46n72, 63, 74, 126–127, 161
- Aelius Aristides 40, 47n100, 91, 93, 103, 105, 136, 141nn9–10, 161; *Or. 33 (To those who criticize him because he does not declaim)* 98; *Or. 51* 40; *On an incidental remark* 149n134; *To Plato in defense of oratory* 47n96; *Sacred Tales* 105, 141n10
- Aelius Donatus: *Ars Grammatica* 32
- Aeschines 20, 35–37, 47n89, 61–62, 115, 148n113; *Or. 1 (Against Timarchus)* 36; *Or. 2 (On the embassy)* 37, 126–127; *Or. 3 (Against Ctesiphon)* 35, 37, 62
- Agamemnon 34–35
- agon* 2, 6–7, 11n3, 12n5, 39, 59, 60, 78–79, 89, 95, 104, 107, 108, 130, 134–135, 162
- Alexander 110, 143n30
- Alexander of Seleucia (“Clay-Plato”) 41
- Ambrose of Milan 72; *De Officiis (On the duties of the clergy)* 79
- Ammianus Marcellinus: *Res Gestae* 57–58, 72, 80n1, 150n148
- Amphilochius 97
- Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* 61–62
- Antioch 90–91, 97, 102, 103, 106, 119, 128–132, 136, 137, 144n45, 146n87, 148n117, 150n149; Great Church of 113–114; Riot of the Statues 73, 99, 137–139
- Antisthenes 124
- Antoninus 41
- Aphthonius 145n79
- Appuleius Saturninus 38
- Apsines 94–95
- Ares 106
- Aristaenetos 130, 148n121
- Aristeides 36
- Aristophanes: *Acharnians* 105
- Aristotle 20, 23, 31, 42n12, 42nn14–15, 43n17, 43n20, 44n48, 109, 116, 145n78; *poetics* 23; *problems* 23; *rhetoric* 22, 23, 63, 114, 115, 117, 144n62, 160
- Aristoxenus 81n17
- arrangement 21, 39; see also *dispositio*
- Artemon 74
- Asclepius 136
- Asianism 77, 120–122, 147n101
- Athanasius: *Prefatory Remarks to Hermogenes’ On Issues* 24, 43n23
- Athanasius of Alexandria: *Life of St. Antony* 148n109

Athenaeus: *Deipnosophistae* 23–24

Athens 41, 42n12, 94–97, 100, 105–108, 122, 128, 141n11, 144n54

Atticism 24, 97, 101, 120–122, 147n99, 101, 102

audiences 1, 2, 6–8, 10, 13n29, 21–24, 30, 32–33, 37, 39–41, 43n16, 45n58, 47n89, 61–66, 70–71, 74, 77, 79, 82n46, 89, 91, 93, 98–99, 103, 109–110, 114–115, 118–121, 123, 126–128, 133–135, 137–138, 141n6, 145n80, 149n131, 132, 150n152, 160, 162–163

Audentia episcopalis 72

Augustine 144n46

Basil of Caesarea 73–76, 82n53, 100–101, 142n29; *Ep. 1* 144n54; *Ep. 223* 144n54; *Ep. 335* 142n29; *Ep. 336* 142n29; *Ep. 338* 79; *Ep. 339* 73; *Ep. 346* 142n29; *Ep. 348* 75–76, 143n37; *Ep. 349* 143n29; *Ep. 350* 143n29; *Ep. 351* 100–101; *Ep. 353* 101

Bemarchius 107, 109–119, 127, 145n66, 145n73, 146n90

body (in oratorical contexts) 1, 7, 22, 24–27, 33, 37, 39, 43n34, 45n58, 67, 96

Caesarius (*comes rei privatae*) 93

Caesarius (*magister officiorum*) 138

Caracalla 41

Cassius Longinus: *Art of Rhetoric* 31–32

Celsus (governor of Cilicia) 142n15

Celsus (student of Libanius) 93

Chrysantius 66, 80n10

Chrysippus 44n38

Cicero 3, 13n25, 26–28, 29, 31–32, 38–39, 43n21, 44n35, 44n47–48, 45n65, 65, 70, 162; *Brutus* 27, 38–39, 147n101; *De Inventione* 26, 44n46; *De Oratore* 23, 27–28, 44n40; *De Partitione Oratoria* 26; *Orator* 44n40

Cimon 140

Codex Theodosianus 72, 97, 116

Constans 145n66, 148n116

Constantine 67, 72, 111, 113; Mausoleum of 113–114

Constantinople 66, 73, 77, 100, 107–111, 113–114, 117–125, 127–129, 132, 138–139, 144n58, 147nn92–93, 147n96, 147n101, 148n116, 149n130; Council of 74

Constantius II 62, 66, 80n13, 109, 112–113, 121–122, 127, 145n66, 148n116

Constantius Gallus 129, 148n119

contest (in oratorical contexts) 2–3, 11n3, 22, 40, 63, 67, 70, 79, 93–94, 100–102, 108, 119, 130; see also *agon*

Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum 145n64

Cratinus 120

Crispinus 106–107

Damascius: *Life of Isidore/The Philosophical History* 61, 68, 80n10

Demetrius of Phalerum 24; *On Style* (ascribed to Demetrius of Phalerum) 24–25, 115

Demosthenes 20, 24, 28–29, 35–38, 44n35, 47n86, 47n89, 47n93, 90, 91, 93, 96, 100–101, 126–127, 140, 141n10, 143n36; *Or. 18 (On the crown)* 36, 141n10; *Or. 19 (On the false embassy)* 36

Dio Chrysostom 63; *To the people of Alexandria (Or. 32)* 47n96, 63, 68; *On personal appearance (Or. 72)* 47n96, 81n31

Diogenes Laertius: *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 43n19

Dionysius of Halicarnassus 28–29, 77, 147n101; *The Ancient Orators* 43n31, 121–122; *Demosthenes* 114–115; *Isocrates* 115

Dionysius of Miletus 64

Diophantus 106

Dioscorides 81n34

Egypt 110–114

Ellebichus 137–138

emotions (in oratorical and rhetorical contexts) 22–25, 27, 29, 31–33, 38, 44n44, 45n59, 78, 80n9, 128

Epiphanius (teacher) 106

Epiphanius of Syria (sophist) 60

Eunapius of Sardes: *History* 132, 145n66; *Lives of the philosophers and sophists* 60, 66, 77, 80n10, 81n24, 82n57, 94–96, 99–101, 106, 118–120, 132, 141n11, 143n34, 147n92, 147n99

Eunomius 76

Eusebius of Caesarea 72; *Historia Ecclesiastica* 74–76; *Life of Constantine* 113

Eutropius 118

Flavian 73, 99, 138–139

Fortunatianus: *Artis Rhetoricae* 33

Galen 39; *Exhortation to the study of medicine* 144n45

George of Cappadocia 77

Gnaeus Lentulus 27

Gorgias 65

Greek Anthology 109

Greek Magical Papyri 146n89

Gregory of Nazianzus 2, 5, 10, 73, 100; *Concerning his own life* 76–78; *Or. 2 (In defense of his flight to Pontus)* 74; *Or. 4 (First Invective against Julian the emperor)* 81n20; *Or. 21 (On the great Athanasius)* 77; *Or. 33 (Against the Arians)* 109; *Or. 42 (Farewell address to the Bishops)* 74, 78

Gregory of Nyssa 73

Hector 112

Heracles 111, 120, 124

Hermes 106, 133, 134, 135

Hermogenes 24, 43n23; *Progymnasmata* 145n78; *On Style* 115

Herodes Atticus 41

Himerius 59, 89, 100, 120, 141n14; *Or. 15* 148n115; *Or. 35* 59, 143n30; *Or. 38* 59; *Or. 39* 59, 97; *Or. 40* 59; *Or. 41* 147n101; *Or. 44* 96; *Or. 45* 59; *Or. 61* 94; *Or. 62* 59; *Or. 63* 94; *Or. 64* 59; *Or. 65* 94

Homer 19, 20, 34–35, 46n80, 69; *Iliad* 34, 46n79, 112

Hygieinus 96

Hypatia 68–69

Hyperechius 93

hypókrisis 6, 9, 11, 13n37, 19–25, 29, 31–34, 38, 42n2, 42nn4–5, 42n12, 42nn14–15, 43n28, 43nn31–32, 46n73, 57, 89, 96, 160–161

invention 21–22, 29, 39, 78; *see also inventio*

Isaeus 64

Isidore of Alexandria 61, 68, 80n10

Isocrates 24, 28, 145n64

John Chrysostom 73, 78, 82n60; *On Priesthood (De Sacerdotio)* 79; *On the Statues* 137–139, 150n142

John Zonaras: *Lexicon* 111

Julian 58, 90, 92–93, 131–136, 141n12, 146n83, 149n125, 149nn129–130; *Caesars* 77, 82n56; *Or. 1 (Panegyric in Honour of Constantius)* 122; *Or. 2 (The Heroic Deeds of Constantius)* 80n13, 121; *Or. 6 (To the Uneducated Cynics)* 67

Julianus of Cappadocia 94–96

Julius Caesar 38

Julius Victor: *Ars Rhetorica* 32

Juvenal 45n54

lexis 22–23, 29, 42n15

Libanius of Antioch 2, 10–11, 59, 75–77, 79, 82n53, 89–93, 96–140, 141nn9–11, 142n15, 142n26, 142nn28–29, 143n32, 143nn36–37, 144nn45–46, 144n51, 144n58, 146n86, 147n92, 147n97, 147n99, 147n105, 148n106, 148n113, 149n134, 149n140; *Declamations* 146n84; *Ep. 6B* 82n42; *Ep. 6N* 130–132, 148n122; *Ep. 7B* 82n42; *Ep. 14N* 131; *Ep. 22N* 92; *Ep. 36N* 96; *Ep. 40N* 92; *Ep. 45B* 93; *Ep. 47F* 91; *Ep. 60B* 92; *Ep. 74N* 118; *Ep. 76N* 93; *Ep. 78N* 144n49; *Ep. 85N* 129, 131; *Ep. 88N* 92, 142n15, 149n125; *Ep. 90N* 118, 131; *Ep. 92N* 142n15; *Ep. 94B* 143n30; *Ep. 101N* 131; *Ep. 115N* 92; *Ep. 124B* 112; *Ep. 127N* 82n42; *Ep. 141N* 119–122; *Ep. 144N* 97; *Ep. 147N* 145n64; *Ep. 165C* 131; *Ep. 191N* 140; *Ep. 193N* 150n151; *Ep. 218F* 91; *Ep. 539F* 143n32; *Ep. 1135F* 93; *Ep. 1534F* 91; *On Genius* 132; *Or. 1 (Autobiography)* 59, 81n35, 89, 92, 98–140, 141n11, 143n30, 143n32, 148n112, 148n117, 149n130, 149n138; *Or. 2 (To those who called him tiresome)* 91, 137, 149n133, 150n152; *Or. 3 (To his students about his Speech)* 91, 98, 100, 148n112, 149n139; *Or. 11 (In praise of Antioch)* 125, 146n87; *Or. 12 (To the Emperor Julian as Consul)* 149n129; *Or. 13 (An Address to Julian)* 92, 141n12, 142n15; *Or. 18 (Funeral oration over Julian)* 93, 141n12, 149n131; *Or. 19 (To the Emperor Theodosius, about the Riots)* 73, 126, 138–139; *Or. 25 (On Slavery)* 71–72; *Or. 30 (To the Emperor Theodosius, for the Temples)* 90; *Or. 31 (To the Antiochenes for the Teachers)* 92, 93; *Or. 35 (To those who do not speak)* 96–97, 100; *Or. 36 (On the magical practices)* 117; *Or. 38 (Against Silvanus)* 146n83; *Or. 39 (Consolation to Antiochus)* 143n32; *Or. 40 (To Eumolpius)* 141n14, 143n32, 149n131; *Or. 41 (To Timocrates)* 148n114, 150n141; *Or. 43 (About the agreements)* 148n117; *Or. 45 (To the Emperor, on the Prisoners)* 90; *Or. 52 (On the governors' levees II)* 148n117; *Or. 55 (To Anaxentius)* 93, 102, 107; *Or. 60 (Monody on the temple of Apollo in Daphne)* 150n148; *Or. 61 (Monody for Nicomedia)* 94, 122; *Or. 62 (Against critics of his educational system)* 81n37, 98, 112, 135, 143n33

Limenius 110–111

Lucian of Samosata 39, 101, 109; *In praise of Demosthenes (Pseudo-Lucian)* 143n36; *Professor of Rhetoric* 64; *Pseudologista* 47n103

Malchion 74

Marcus Antonius 27

Marcus Calidius 38

Marius Victorinus: *Ars Grammatica* 32–33

memory 21, 39, 123, 126–127, 148n109; see also *memoria*

Menander Rhetor 59, 92

Muses 59–60, 106

New Testament: *Acts* 103

Nicaea 72, 122, 124; Council of 79

Nicocles [107–108](#), [123](#)
Nicomedia [111](#), [119](#), [122–129](#)
Nigidius Figulus [44n35](#)

Odysseus [34](#), [105](#), [141n11](#)
Olympiodorus: *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades* [62](#)
Orfitus [58](#)
Orpheus [66](#)

Paideia [9](#), [11n4](#), [59–60](#), [62–63](#), [66](#), [68](#), [73](#), [81n15](#), [91](#), [113](#), [125](#), [126](#), [163](#)
Palestine [131](#), [136](#)
Palladius [93](#)

Paris (Trojan prince) [112](#)
Paul of Samosata [74–76](#), [82n50](#)
Pausanias (sophist) [109](#)
periautologia [134–135](#), [161](#)
Pericles [36](#)

Phasganius [129](#), [131](#)
Philagrus of Cilicia [41](#), [149n132](#)
Philip of Macedonia [37–38](#)
Philiscus [41](#)

Philodemus of Gadara: *On Rhetoric* [25](#), [43nn31–32](#)
Philostratus: *Lives of the Sophists* [40–41](#), [47nn101–102](#), [64](#), [81n14](#), [105](#), [109](#), [114](#), [115](#), [142n16](#),
[145n64](#), [147n101](#), [149n132](#)

Phoenicia [131](#)
Phoenix [46n75](#)
Photius: *Bibliotheca* [101](#)

Pistoria [58](#)
Plato [10](#), [23](#), [43n17](#), [45n57](#), [47n96](#), [61](#), [81n31](#); *Laws* [144n50](#); *Phaedo* [71](#); *Phaedrus* [42n12](#), [76](#),
[81n29](#); *Republic* [144n50](#); *Symposium* [82n52](#)

Pliny the Younger [1–2](#), [5](#), [11](#)
Plotius Gallus [44n35](#)
Plutarch [24](#), [161](#); *Life of Demosthenes* [38](#); *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively* [109](#), [135](#); *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* [44n38](#)

Polycles [146n83](#)
Proclus: *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades* [62](#)
Procopius [57–58](#)
Prohaeresius [95](#), [100](#), [132](#), [142n20](#)

Quintilian [13](#), [45nn57–58](#), [45n65](#), [70](#); *Institutio Oratoria* [9](#), [20–21](#), [29–32](#), [35](#), [38](#), [44n35](#), [45n56](#),
[57](#), [147n101](#), [160](#), [162](#)

Rhetorica ad Herennium [25](#), [27](#), [42n6](#), [43n34](#)
Richomer [137](#)
Rome [41](#), [148n116](#)

Salutius [82n42](#)
Satyrus [38](#)
Scopelian [105](#)

Scribonius Curio 39
 Second Sophistic 4, 39, 47n93, 47n98, 80n9, 83n62
 self-praise 109, 134–135, 144n63, 149n133, 149n134, 160–161; *see also periautologia*
 Seneca: *Ep.* 56 142n24
 Severianus 80n10
 silence 37, 57, 97–98, 116–117, 123, 127, 130, 133, 140, 142n26, 148n114
 Sirens 59, 63, 80n14
 Sisyphus 71
 Socrates 65
 Socrates Scholasticus: *Historia Ecclesiastica* 67, 76, 78–79, 83n61, 122, 147n92
 Solon 36, 47n90
 Sozomen: *Historia Ecclesiastica* 78
 Spectatus 82n42
stasis 29
 Strategius Musonianus (Praetorian Prefect) 130
On the sublime 29, 146n82
Suda 42n10, 111, 132, 145n64
 Suetonius: *Life of Caesar* 47n95
 Sulpicius 38
 Synesius of Cyrene 2, 10, 68–72, 75–77, 81nn30–31, 89, 162; *Dio* 59, 68, 70–71; *On Dreams* 70;
Ep. 1 68; *Ep.* 154 69; *Eulogy of Baldness* 68

 Tacitus: *Dialogue on Oratory* 45n54
 Terence 32, 46n71
 theatricality 45n59, 79, 80n9, 37
 Themistius 2, 3, 5, 10, 62–68, 71, 75–76, 80n14, 89, 119–122, 147n97, 162; *Or.* 1 (*On love of mankind or Constantius*) 62, 65; *Or.* 3 (*Embassy speech on behalf of Constantinople delivered in Rome*) 65; *Or.* 5 (*On the Consulship, to the emperor Jovian*) 65; *Or.* 6 (*On brotherly love*) 65; *Or.* 16 (*Speech of thanksgiving to the Emperor for the peace*) 66; *Or.* 20 (*A funeral oration in honor of his father*) 65; *Or.* 21 (*The Examiner*) 65, 145n68; *Or.* 22 (*On friendship*) 64; *Or.* 23 (*The Sophist*) 65; *Or.* 24 (*An Exhortation to the Nicomedians*) 65–66; *Or.* 26 (*On Speaking*) 67; *Or.* 28 (*Disquisition on speaking*) 63–68, 114; *Or.* 33 (*title lost*) 81n17
 Themistocles 36
 Themistocles (student of the sophist Apsines) 95–96
 Theodore Metochites: *Semeioseis gnomikai* 101
 Theodosius 73, 99, 104, 125–126, 137–139
 Theon: *Progymnasmata* 145n78
 Theophilus 140
 Theophrastus 20; *On Delivery* 23–24, 43n19
 Thersites 34–35, 46n76, 46n79, 46n81
 Third Sophistic 4
 Thrasymachus: *Emotional Appeals* 42n12
 Timarchus 36–37
 Timocrates 150n141
 Tuccius Cerialis 1
 Tyche 102–103, 128, 133–135, 144n45

 Ulpianus 105, 144n51

Valens 57, 135–136, 149n140

Valentinian 57

voice 2, 5, 7, 21–27, 29–35, 38, 40–41, 42n11, 42n15, 43n34, 44n38, 44n41, 46n72, 47n89, 63, 66, 70–71, 76, 81nn34–35, 96–97, 124, 126, 160

Xenocrates 69

Zenobius 130

Zosimus: *New History* 150n144

Latin terms

actio 6, 9, 19–22, 25–33, 42n2, 42n4, 42n8, 44n40, 44n48, 45n55, 46n73, 57

dispositio 45n55

ethopoeia 127

exercitatio 25

firmitudo 25

imitatio 25

inventio 34

magnitudo 25

memoria 45n55

mollitudo 26

motus 26, 46n72

officia oratoris 21, 25, 39, 160

ornatus 27

pronuntiatio 6, 9, 19–22, 25–26, 31–33, 42n2, 42n4, 42n8, 46n72, 57

Greek terms

ἀντίτεχνος 123, 130

αὔξησις 115

βακχεία 128

γότης 75

διήγημα 115

ἔκφρασις 115, 145n79

ἐνάργεια 115

εὐκρίνεια 115

εὐπραγία 117–118

εὐρυθμία 115

θυμός 125–126, 148n108

καθαρότης 115

κύπος 114

μελέτη 70, 94, 143n137

ὀργή 123, 125–126, 148n108

προαγών 79

σαφήνεια 115–117, 119, 127, 145nn78–79

σωφοσύνη 40

τραγωδέω 112, 145n68

τροφή 121, 139

ὕλακτέω 112

ὑποκριτής 19–20, 23, 43n19

φθόνος [117–118](#), [146n90](#)

φιλία [112](#)

φιλονεικία [78–79](#), [83n61](#)